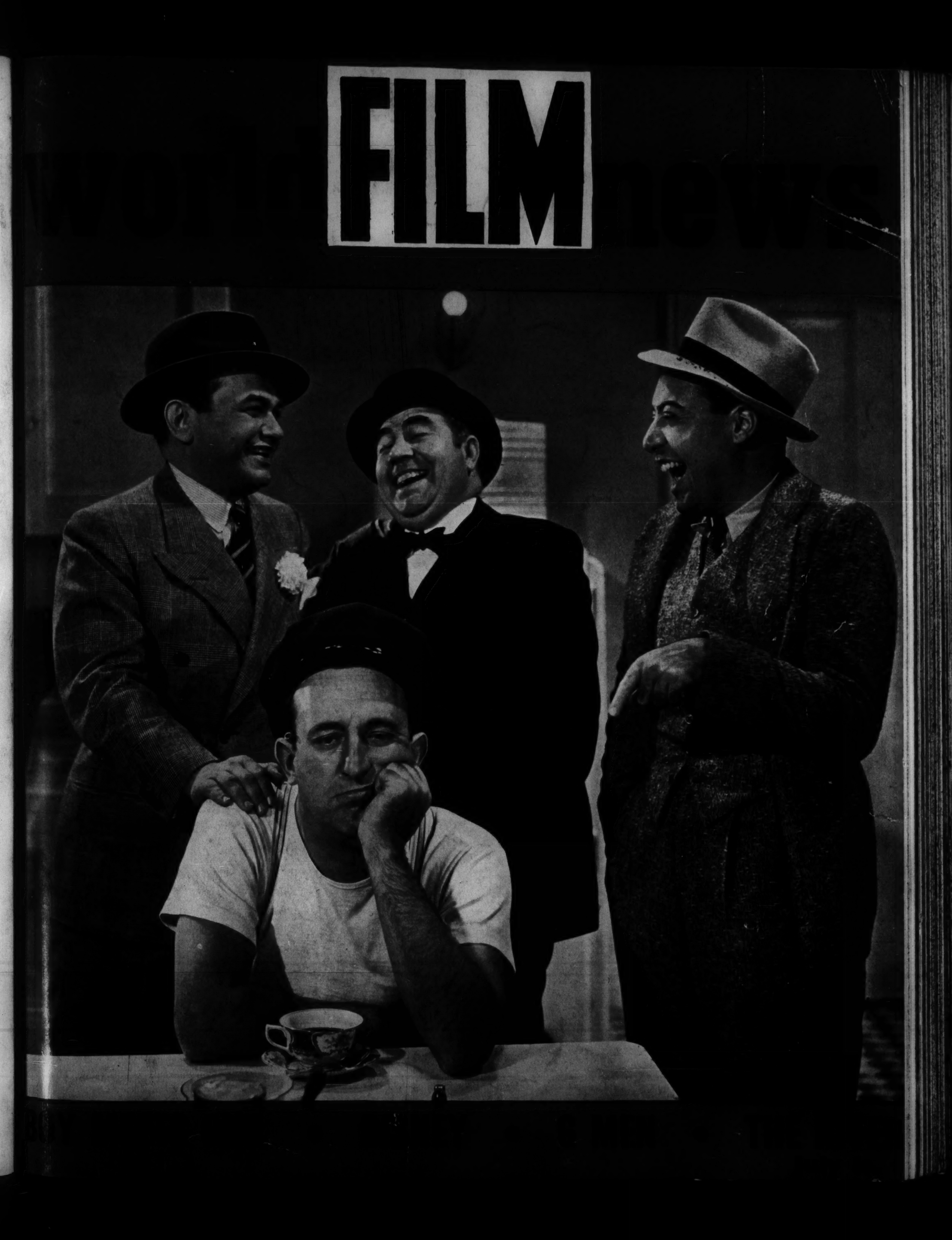
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WORLD FILM NEWS

JULY 1938

Vol. 3 No. 3

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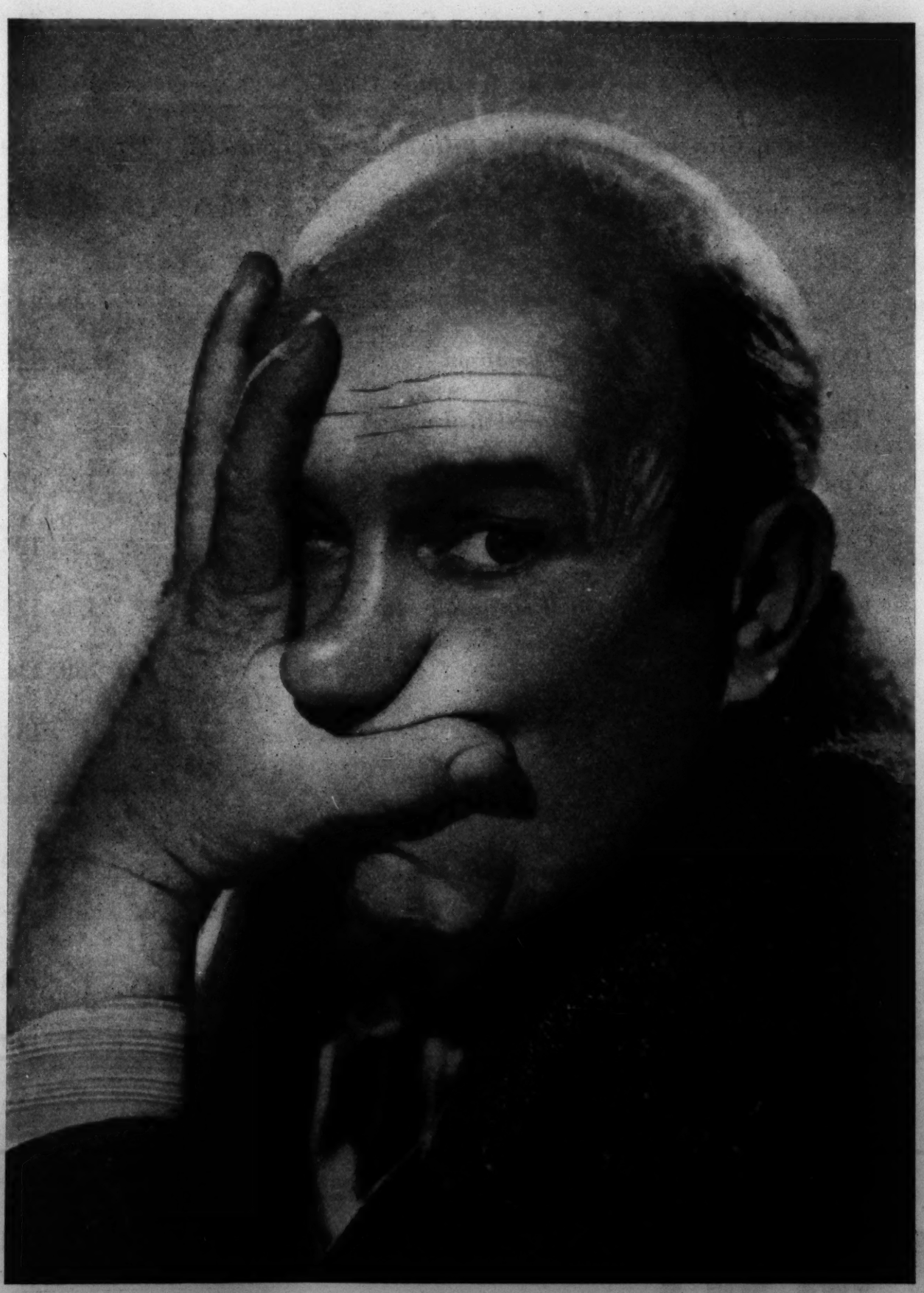
"WHO'S GOT FUNDAMENTALS ANY MORE?"

asks 'Slow-burn' Edgar Kennedy in an interview

with RUSSELL FERGUSON



I've had twenty-six years of it now. I was a prize-fighter for a bit before that, but I reckoned if I had brains enough for a boxer I had brains enough for an actor. I was one of the Keystone cops, with Mack Swain, Chester Conklin, Roscoe Arbuckle, and all those boys. Mack Swain, he died last year, Chester Conklin's pretty well off by now, doesn't act much.

Not that I've done so bad myself. I can't stay in features all the time—every two or three years I take a turn at directing. I'm a comedy director, I've directed Laurel and Hardy and Charley Chase and things for Hal Roach. It gives me a change and keeps me off the screen for a bit. I do six shorts a year for R.K.O., too. I have to start right in when I get back this summer.

I guess I'm one of the guys that never let himself get too big—like Jean Hersholt for instance, just moving along and doing his work without wanting to be a star. Stars get too much money, and they get into bad pictures, and that's one of the ways they go out. You see, when a star gets popular the company gets to rely on him to sell pictures whether they're good or bad, and anyway, if the star is real big they can't afford to pay for good support.

If you're a good featured player, now, it pays you in a lot of ways. You get good money, and you get into good pictures, because if the company has to pay a good figure for you, they want to put you in something worth while so as to get their money's worth out of you. When a featured player gets well known, he gets into better and better pictures; when a star gets well known, there's the danger he gets into worse and worse pictures, for the reason I've said. I don't know if I've made it clear for you, but that's how I figure it out.

Now, there's Adolphe Menjou—there's a guy I've never seen in a bad film. Do you ever think what a background a man like that has got? What experience? He's always working too, because he's a damned fine actor. He gives his experience to the whole bunch, he wouldn't *let* a picture get bad, even if it was shaping that way, he'd throw his weight into it and pull it round. A man like Menjou is worth all the money he gets, because he knows his job from the bottom up.

You know, I think the men who were in the silent films have it over the newcomers who belong to the talkie time. Do you remember the old silent days? We had to act everything, and make the right faces and stand the right way and dope out actions and gestures for everything. That experience stays with you—many a time I forget my lines because I'm working inside on the business that goes with them, may be wrestling with a door-handle or having a stand-up argument with a wardrobe door, and if it doesn't work out, I forget my lines because I haven't got the whole thing going smooth, from inside, while some guy standing by like a poker thinking of nothing but his lines comes out with them as smooth as silk and thinks he's an actor.

That's what the talkies have done to the movies. In the old days, if you didn't act it, nobody knew what it was supposed to be. Nowadays, talk, talk, talk, it's all on the sound track, and you can get by without acting at all. Did you know that there's a new school of acting taking place just now? They don't act.

I'll tell you a funny thing to show you what I mean. It was—well, he's a good guy, so I won't tell you his name. He was to get shot through the shoulder in a fight, and step forward when he heard "Anybody hurt?" and say "I'm shot through the shoulder". Well, we play it, and he steps forward and says "I'm shot through the shoulder", like saying "I'm all out of cigarettes" or something. The scene has to be taken again for some reason, right at the end of our stay on location, when we're all tired and wanting to get home, and I says to him "Only another day now" and he says "What for?" and I says "For your shooting scene".

He says "Hell, that will take less than half an hour". I says "Yes, the way you did it. Have you ever been shot through the shoulder? It hurts like hell, and that bullet was supposed to go clean through you from the back, or else it was a pretty bum bullet. Look, *hit me* in the shoulder, never mind shooting me, and I'll let you know I've been hit, and I was a prize-fighter". "Ah", he says, "you're out-of-date. We don't act nowadays". I couldn't resist it. I says, "Damn right. You don't act, but you call yourself an actor".

There's more to it, too. With all this talk, there's something has gone out of the movies, nearly. I don't know if you remember, but in the old silent days you and I and my wife could go to a movie, and come out with three different ideas of it, because we were three different people.

Look, what I think is, people are interested in what a guy is thinking, not what he's saying, at least, they may be interested in what he's saying, but what they like best is to figure out for themselves what he's thinking, without being told. That's where they get the real joy, in seeing for themselves what's not too obvious. This is hard to explain, I guess, but I'll prove it to you.

Have you seen Will Hay's act at the Palladium, his school act? Well, it's a swell act all right. Remember the bit where he has that gag "Moses was the daughter of Pharaoh's son", and one of the kids asks him to write it on the board, and he writes "Moses was the daughter of" and then stops there with his back to the audience and his arm in the air ready to write and does nothing. It gets the biggest laugh in the whole act. Now, I ask you, why? Would it be funny if he said "I can't spell Pharaoh"? Would it? It would mean exactly the same as stopping there. But the way Will does it, the audience gets its chance to use its own judgment, and that's why they think it's so good. I guess the audience contributes. That's a fundamental part of the whole game.

Edgar Kennedy, Frank McHugh and Joan Blondell in the Warner Bros. hit "Three Men on a Horse"

But who's got fundamentals, any more? I guess the most of the movies start way up top, with no fundamentals, they don't get down to the things that get the belly-laughs, or really do something to you.

Just to show you what some guys know about acting, I'll tell you about the first musical I ever played in. The director has an idea and calls me into one scene, and says "Ed, I want you in here, and I want a slow-burn, and I want it in four beats of the music".

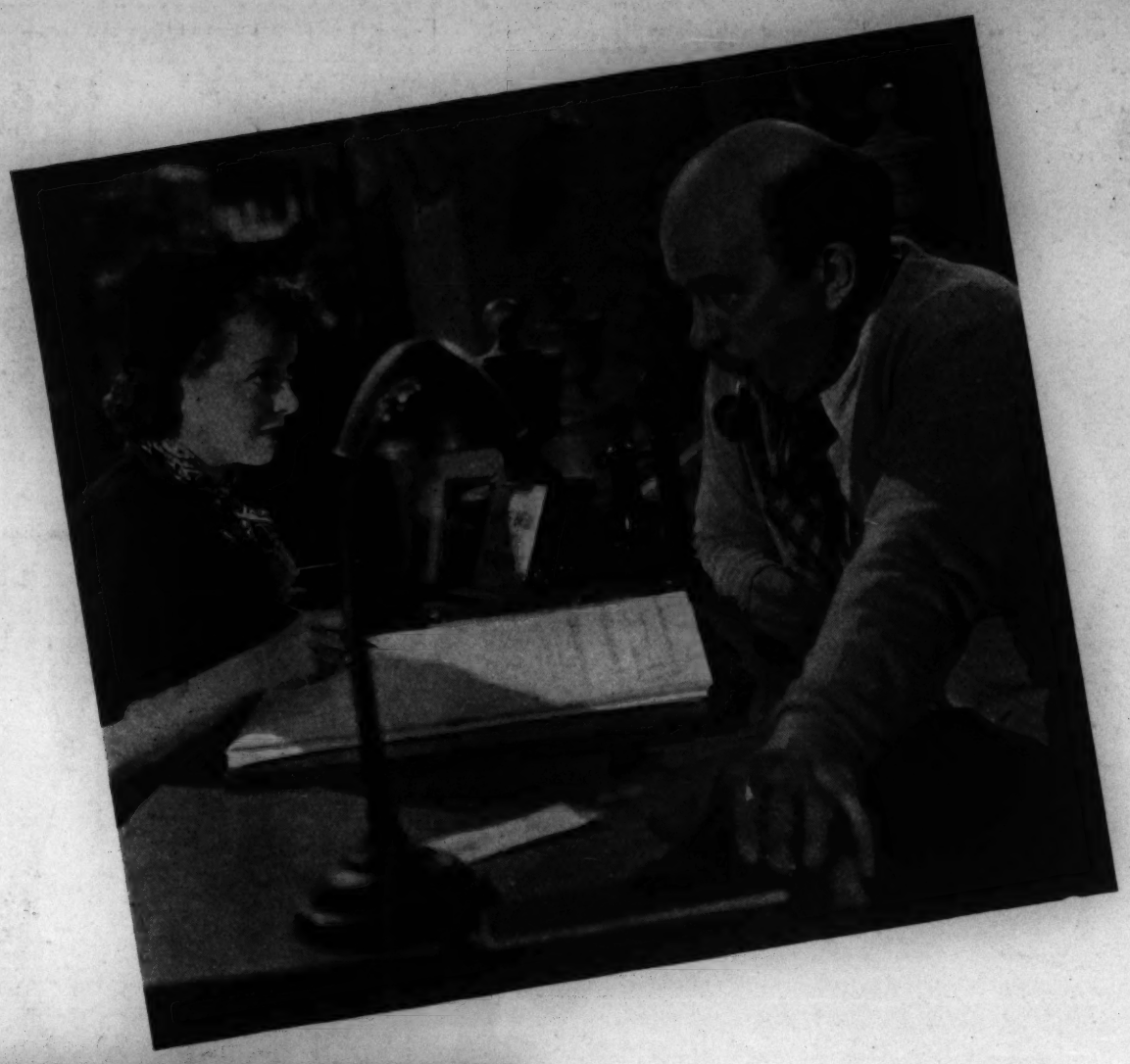
Well, I ask you. Can you imagine what it feels like to be asked to do a quick slow-burn? I'm a reasonable guy, so I practised a minute or two, and then told him it was no use. He goes to the music director, and comes back with the great news that I can get six beats. This was just about as bad. Finally, I got eight beats from him and made it. But hell! What an idea! Slow-burning to a metronome. Timing isn't done with a clock. Timing is just thinking. I said that to you away back, when I told you about forgetting lines, through having my head full of timing.

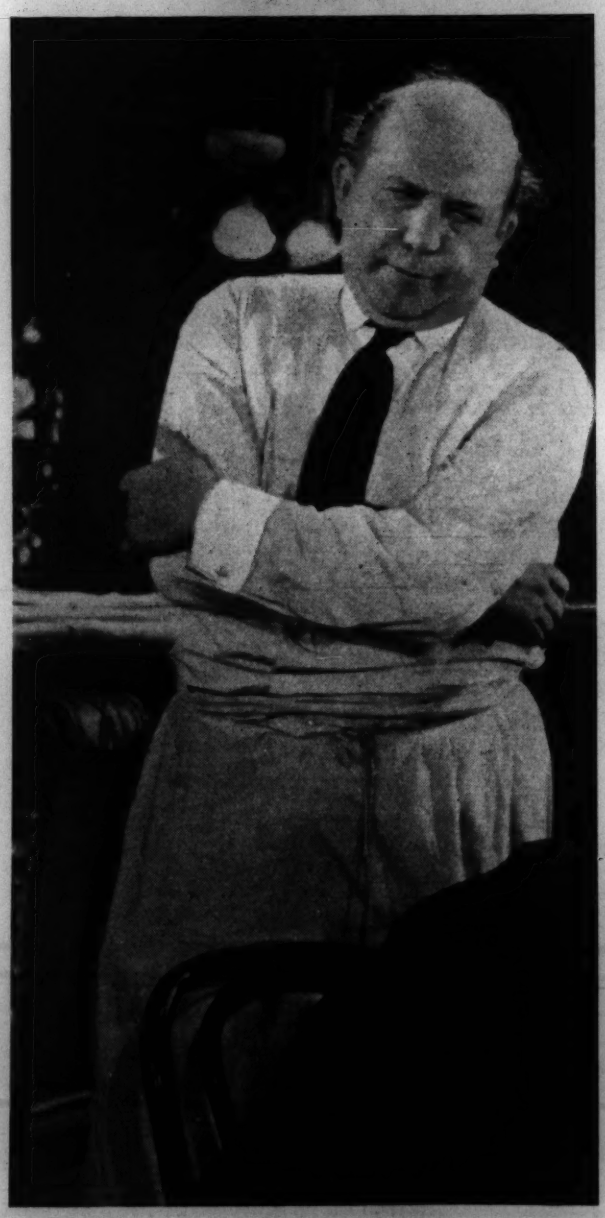
HULLO, Will. Come right in, Will. Well, well, so you're sliding out before they see you go. I don't blame you, Will. When are you getting a rest? At the week-end? Well, you deserve it. So long, Will.

There's a man that's doing a picture and a week at the Palladium at the same time. That's what I call working. He's a great guy, a real fifty-fifty guy. He makes a team. I never worked with a guy I liked working with better. He was a bit shy with me at first.

His hobby is astronomy, he has quite a place, quite an observatory or whatever it is you call it, at his private house at Hendon. I guess he loves his hobby as much as his screen acting.

SURE, I like it here at Gainsborough. I like the way Will works, I told you, and I like the way the whole place works. They are treating me as well as ever I have been treated





Top: Edgar Kennedy with Janet Gaynor in "A Star is Born." Above: "Three Men on a Horse."

in my twenty-six years in the movies. Do you know, I get my own way in practically everything? I don't always get what I asked for at first, but what I do get is always what I want, because we just talk things over, and if my way's best, we do it like that, and if their way's best, I see it while we're talking, and we do it like that. Everybody takes part in any discussion, Will, little Tommy Bupp and our Director, Marcel Varnel, and there's no bad manners or quarrels, and nobody gets on his high horse and can't get down, and there's nobody waiting for you in corners saying "That guy's got it in for me, know what he said to so and so?" and there's nobody asking you to take sides.

I like England too. I wish I could have some place in the country and go to it at nights. Hotels are not my kind of life, but I have to stay in a hotel, working till half-past seven with a call next morning at nine. I eat most of my meals in my room because I'm too tired to dress that time of night. Like a working man? Sure, that's what I am, a working man.

But still I've seen a good bit of London already and I took a trip up to Edinburgh last week-end—Princes Street is the loveliest street I've seen—with that castle on the hill and all.

The only thing that amused me about England was seeing people eating with a knife in one hand and a fork in the other. At home we were taught to cut everything first and eat it dainty with a fork, and many a time I've smacked my boy and said "*Would* you put that knife down?" but I guess he's a natural Englishman or something. The English are so good at it too, they use the knife so pretty. I tried it, but hell, I couldn't get anything on the fork. I told my wife about it as soon as I saw it, and she didn't believe it, till one night we were dining out and she exclaims "Ed, Ed, I saw a woman do it. I saw a woman do it." Well I'm getting over it. I guess it must be right enough for here. I expect Queen Elizabeth does it too.

WHAT have you seen recently? Tom Sawyer? Was it good? A swell film? Yeah, I guessed so. All the same, films should be films, not made out of books, at least, not well-known books, because books are alive, and they are quite different for different people. A film of a book is never more than fifty per cent. successful for me, often a good deal less, at least, *as* a film of the book. One book I read when I was a kid—no, I've never read it since, I'm afraid to, I might lose something of it—was "Les Misérables". Every time it's filmed, I go and see it. Every time, I feel, they've missed everything. But every time it's good as a film. Do I say it's a lousy film? No, I have no right to say that, because the man that made it has as much right to his "Les Misérables" as I have to mine, though I may go on thinking I know more about it than he does. Anyway, you should never say a film is lousy. It's not fair. It would be all right to lay into it if the guys weren't trying, but hell! I've never seen a film where the actors aren't trying all they know. Maybe not your way, but if you knew how much sweat goes into it, you would let it go by, even if you didn't like it much. Anyhow, that's my point of view, and I guess I know a little about films.

I'll tell you a good gag to try on some guy when he comes out of a movie with you, saying "God, that stank." It works every time. Start off with "Well, I thought the bit about the shoes was kinda nice." He says "Yes, so it was". Then go on with "And the bit where the girl waved the handkerchief". He says, "Yes, quite nice". Then you say "And the bit where the dog ran out", and he says "Yes, it was quite well done". Then when you've got him that far you say "Why, you liked the main things in the film, and you have the cheek to say it's lousy. You goddam son of a bitch, what do you expect for a quarter?"

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WORLD FILM NEWS

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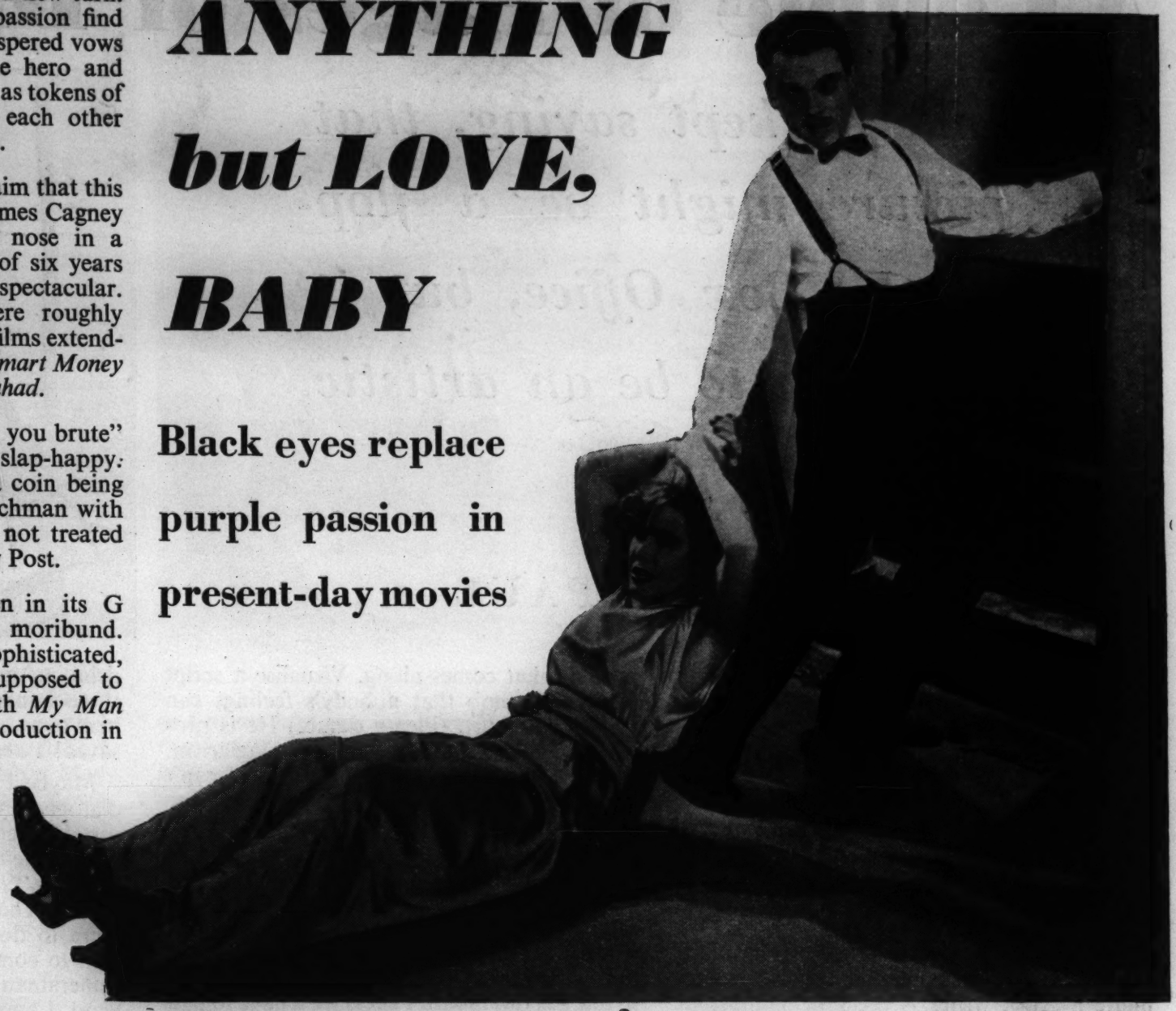
ANYTHING but LOVE, BABY

Black eyes replace purple passion in present-day movies



LOVE, in the cinema, has taken a new turn. No longer does the tender passion find expression in soulful glances, whispered vows or burning clinches. Instead, the hero and heroine trade volleys of uppercuts as tokens of their mutual affection, mowing each other down with passionate haymakers.

Historians of the cinema proclaim that this battle of the sexes began when James Cagney gallantly dunked Mae Clarke's nose in a grapefruit in *The Public Enemy* of six years ago. Mae's instance was the most spectacular. Many other gangster molls were roughly treated in that extensive series of films extending from *Beast of the City* and *Smart Money* to *Marked Women* and *Kid Galahad*.

The girls in these "unhand me, you brute" films were never actually knocked slap-happy. They were merely handled like a coin being flipped about by a saturnine henchman with the jitters. In short, they were not treated according to the dictates of Emily Post.

To-day, the gangster film, even in its G Man metamorphosis, is largely moribund. It has been succeeded by the sophisticated, slapstick comedy, popularly supposed to have been born (or re-born) with *My Man Godfrey*, the Gregory la Cava production in which Carole Lombard and William Powell executed some inspired horse-play. *My Man Godfrey* is credited with having initiated the current, pixilated cinema trend.

In these films, the heroine, being unconventional, daring, independent, etc., found herself in ticklish situations from which she found it impossible to extricate herself with the usual, catty drawing-room innuendoes. In this cinematic man's world, where no holds are barred, the little ladies were forced to have recourse to their wits and their punches as well.

Outstanding instances of this feminine emancipation were Jean Arthur, Claudette Colbert and Myrna Loy in such items as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *It Happened One Night* and *The Thin Man*. The girls in these films slept in haystacks, uncovered corpses in their bedroom closets, dashed around the country on buses, and their unprecedented antics ultimately led up to the full-fledged hit-and-run motion pictures.

Examine the evidence. In *True Confession*, the same Miss Lombard who was one of the zanies in *Twentieth Century* and *My Man Godfrey*, was lovingly bounced about by Fred MacMurray, immersed in an Adirondack lake and confronted with the facial apoplectics of John Barrymore. In *Nothing Sacred* she met with further punishment, dishing it out as well. She exchanged uppercuts with Fredric March, jumped in and out of the East River at night and took New York City for a collective ride, suffering all the while from alleged radium poisoning. William (Wild Bill) Wellman, who directed *Nothing Sacred* (and *Public Enemy* also) is noted as one of Hollywood's foremost purveyors of this type of uninhibited business. In fact, Wellman's performance on the motion picture set is described as surpassing that of his stars and equalling that of the supreme master, Ernst Lubitsch.

Thus far, matters were moderately comprehensible. Carole, as a former Sennett bathing beauty, could properly sock and be socked, jump into bodies of water and smear the town a bright red. But further developments in this genre were astounding, to say the least.

Joan Blondell was next to succumb. In both *Back in Circulation* and *There's Always a Woman*, she ripped into and through her roles like the three Ritz Brothers. In the last-named film, Miss Blondell was given a third-degree by a tough police squad throughout the night. The morning found Joan pert and smiling, while the muscle-bound bulldogs of the law were half asleep after their unprecedented exertion.

In *Love, Honor and Behave*, pretty Priscilla Lane squared off in a slugfest with Wayne Morris, who is more than six feet tall. Morris, who proved his pugilistic talents in *Kid Galahad* and *The Kid Comes Back*, almost lost this encounter, but was just saved by the fade-out at the end of the eighth reel.

The staid and stately Irene Dunne, heroine of such tear-jerkers as *Symphony of Six Million* and such quasi-epics as *Cimarron*, went the way of all actresses by becoming brash and pixilated in *The Awful Truth*, one of the better films of last year, directed by the same Leo McCarey who gave us *Make Way for To-morrow*. Miss Dunne, who had passed her preliminary test with *Theodora Goes Wild*, proved here that she could play slapstick with the best of them.

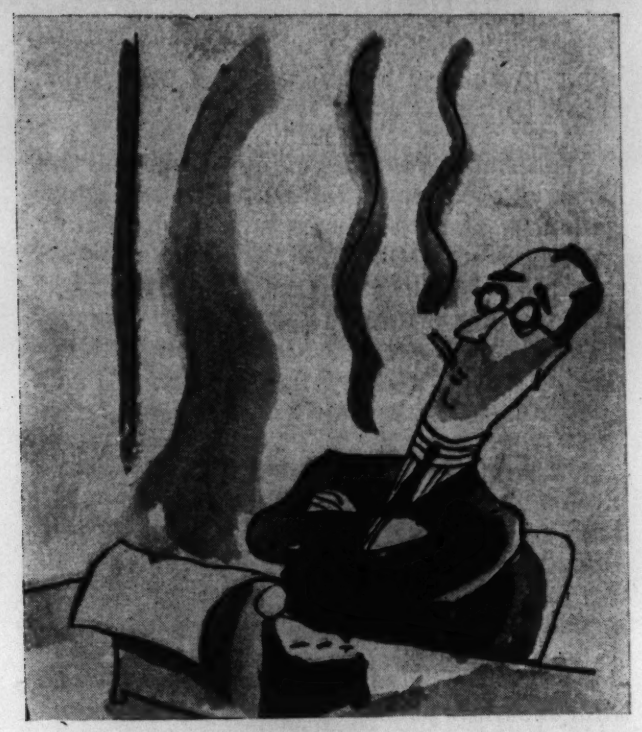
But the great surprise to date came when Katharine Hepburn—The Miss Hepburn—took the plunge in *Bringing Up Baby*. Letting her hair down, Miss Hepburn became involved, consecutively, with such phenomena as psychiatrists, palæontologists, leopards and one of the most lengthy series of slapstick falls since Mabel Normand and Fatty Arbuckle were in their prime. All with remarkable success.

The surrender of Miss Hepburn presages the complete capitulation of the tragediennes of Lower California. The crystal ball of the future reveals visions of Garbo, Dietrich and Temple tangling with impossible people in even more impossible situations, all fomented in the wildest vapourings of desperate scriptwriters, and all dedicated to the belly-laugh. Out of little Keystones does 1938's box-office come.

Ezra Goodman

A Couple of Pages of Dialogue

Like he kept saying, that picture might be a flop at the Box Office, but it was sure to be an artistic success



• by LOUIS PAUL •

THE trouble is this. Once you're pegged at three-fifty a week, try and get a raise. That last musical the seven of us cooked up was a B.O. wow, and yet here I am working my fingers to the bone for peanuts. B.O. can stand for Box Office or Body Odour. Interchangeable synonyms? Can't use it. Even if it weren't too subtle for the horse-opera patrons they'd kill it up in the front office. Maybe I ought to knock out a couple of pages of dialogue this morning. Trouble with that is, if you get anything done in a hurry around here they think it smells. Funny how people figure a script writer is the little pampered darling of fortune. What we go through! Three-fifty a week. It sounds like Death Valley Scotty's gold mine until you deduct agent fees and front—a duplex apartment, ads in the *Hollywood Reporter*, the Troc and Al Levy's, a big dingus every so often for story editors and assorted bums. And that's not counting the income tax and—In fact I'll have to get twenty bucks from Jerry to see me through until Saturday.

This may flop at the box office, but it's certainly going to be an artistic success. All the characters and events depicted herein are entirely fictitious, having been lifted directly from the newspaper headlines. Make a note of a funny story to be worked into next comedy that comes along. Visualise a script writer so dumb that nobody's feelings can possibly be hurt. (Plenty dumb.) He is protesting against the suggestion of plagiarism. "Listen, how could it be plagiarism? I can't even remember the name of the magazine where I read it." Not so good. Lousy. In fact, to put the proper movie-land tag on it, it stinks. Whatever else you may think about Hollywood, we have a mighty colourful vocabulary. A thing is either marvellous or it stinks. Magazines. Well, how about this, then? The editor shakes his head. "We've got so few ads this month I guess we'll have to pad the magazine out with reading matter." Better. A little better.

This may flop at the box office, but—I wonder how much Sam Goldwyn pays a gagman for writing the marvellous solecisms he pulls off. "A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on." A thing like that lives. It's permanent literature, like Andersen and Grimm and Shakespeare. I think I've got an idea for Walt Disney. Donald Duck in *The Ugly Duckling*. Can you imagine that tomato turning into a swan? It'll knock the schoolkids out in the aisle. Or how about this? A burlesque to be called *So What? and the Seven Dopes*. I guess maybe it stinks. Disney doesn't need me. He's doing all right as it is.

Once you're pegged at three-fifty—Maybe I never should have come to Hollywood. I figured I'd get me a nice pile of dough socked away and then pull out and build myself a little shack somewhere and really go to town on a novel. That first novel of mine got pretty good notices, even if it did sell only three hundred copies. Maybe that publisher phonied up his ledgers. It doesn't seem possible that a swell book like that only sold three hundred copies. You can't trust publishers farther than you can kick a pumpkin. In fact you can't trust anybody. Just the same that was a pretty good book. The guy on the *Des Moines Chronicle* said it showed a remarkable knack for anecdote and plot manipulation and was full of quiet humour. But you can't feed yourself and send money home to a hard-drinking grandmother on the royalty from three hundred copies of a book. I've been here two years, and what a pile of dough I've saved! Twenty bucks from Jerry till payday.

Maybe I ought to do a couple of pages of dialogue; it may be an artistic flop, but it's certainly going to be a success at the box office. The truth is, I ought to pull out of here when my contract is up and go over to Paramount. They say a writer gets a chance over there to do a screen play without having it torn to confetti by the director, the assistant cameraman and the gatekeeper. On the other hand, I know what I've got here.

Maybe I'll get ambitious and work up an original in my spare time for Charlie Chan. *Charlie Chan in Hollywood*. A star is shot on the set. A gun with a silencer is concealed in the camera lens. Everybody suspects the cameraman but Charlie Chan, so you know right away somebody else must have done it. We'll make it the script writer, who thinks the star stinks and will ruin his picture. The characters and events depicted in this motion picture are entirely fictitious, and the names of real persons are never knowingly used. Maybe I ought to write a couple of pages of dialogue.

Or what a script writer thinks about. This is what a script writer thinks about: that damned dame. She thinks I can put her in the movies. Me. I am lucky I can put myself in the movies. Everything is going along fine, and then sex rears its ugly head. She thinks all you have to do to get into pictures is to flop on some guy's couch and zingo! your name is up in lights on the marquee of the Capital Theatre in New York. Phooey. Maybe I could talk Frankie into mugging her for a screen test, but what the hell, I'm just as human as the next bird. You'd like to be loved for yourself alone and not because these screwballs think they can use you. Say, that wouldn't make a bad Grade B a-tall! Maybe I'll write it up. Dame puts herself at the mercy of movie producer (I'll make myself a producer in this picture—dramatic licence.)

But this producer has ideals. Aw, the hell with it. No audience'd swallow a story about a movie producer with ideals. The hell with it. I guess it stinks.

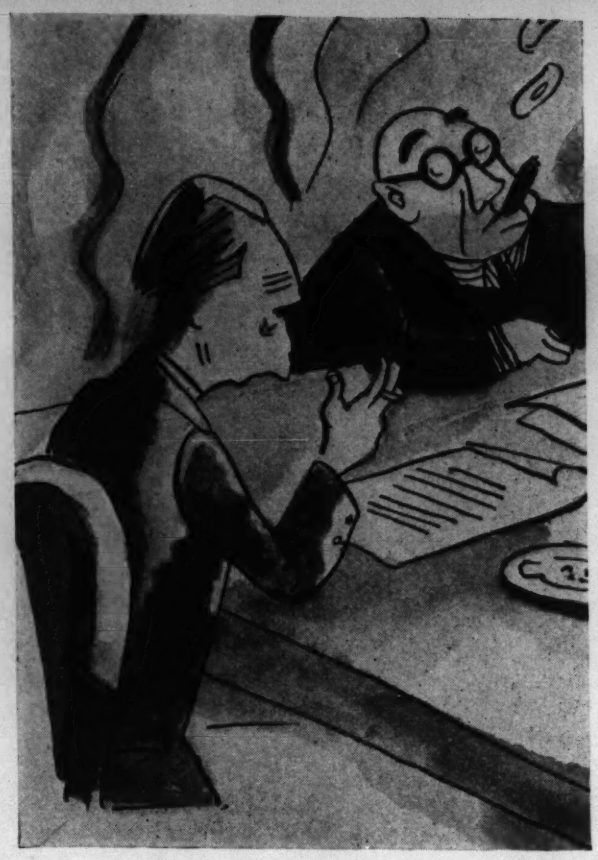
Think I'll call up Eddie Hollis and see what's new. "Operator, get me Hollywood 1251. No—one two *five* one. That's right. Warners'? Scenario. Scenario, operator. No—*scenario*. Where the people sit at typewriters and write. Yes, the place where they write the stories that appear on the screen. Who do I want? Mr. Hollis, Edward Hollis. *Hollis*. Like in—in Hollis. Hello. Hello. What number do I want? Look, operator—I had my number once. Hollywood 1251. Thank you. Hello, good morning, this is Warner Brothers —I mean I want to speak to Ed Hollis in scenario. Say, do we have to go all through that again? The name is Hollis. Do you remember that picture at Sid Grauman's last week, *Isn't Love Lovely?* Yes, well this fellow I'm talking about wrote it. Edward R. Hollis Thanks. Yes, I'll hold the line. De, de, de, do, do. Bei mir bist du schön, please let me exp—Uh. Hello. Hollis? Ed Hollis? Yes, I'm holding the line. Oh, hello, hello. What? Oh, he's not in? Thanks."

Hell, it isn't eleven o'clock yet. An hour till lunch. Maybe I'll go over and inhale a slug of Java. No—been drinking too much coffee lately. The lining of my stomach feels as though I'd swallowed a live canary. Maybe I can use that line. Better jot it down. Suppose I ought to write a couple of pages of dialogue. Anybody thinks holding down a job in Hollywood is a cinch just doesn't realise what us guys go through. Producers: Give us a story like *The Front Page*. Or *Ben Hur*. Or *Hamlet*. Or *One Night of Love*. Directors: I can't film that damn scene: it's not visual. Cameramen: This is a camera, not an X-ray machine; people can't guess what's going on inside a character's head. Stars: It just won't play. I'm telling you. Edwin Booth himself couldn't read those lines. Phooey. One of the best lines show business ever produced: "Don't tell me how to play juveniles! I've been playing juveniles for thirty years."

Then the critics, who never fail to help make a box office flop of an artistic success by hollering the fact out as loud as they can shout; this may be a flop at the box office, but it's certainly going to be an artistic success. A guy sits here and writes his heart out, and what happens? Every seat in the theatre is jammed: Giant Screeno Tonite $200 Jackpot. Phooey.

Well, how about this, then, when a comedy treatment comes along? Some wag hangs a sign on the wall of a convent: Boy Wanted. No so bad, but the Hays office would knock that into a cocked hat. Offensive to religious orders. Didn't religious orders have a sense of humour? It was all in fun. They probably had, but people weren't supposed to know it. There you had the subtle distinction—a distinction for which the Hays office was constantly taking the rap.

What I really ought to do is to get out of Hollywood. I've got things to say, if I ever get the chance to say them. The Great American Novel never will be written so long



as I'm stuck in this hell-hole. Build myself a comfortable little shack somewhere up in the hills and—Telephone.

Probably an insurance agent. "Hello. Yes, this is he." (Boy, am I grammatical!) "Hello. Yes. I said this is he." Then the line goes dead. Nuts. "Hello?" Better hold on. Maybe the producer. "Hello! Yes, I'm holding the line." Bei mir bist du—"Yeah, it's me, I told you." Waste of time handing these screwball operators any ritzy grammar. "Oh, hello. Hello. Who? Oh—Ed Hollis. Say, that's a funny one. I was just trying to get you. I called the studio. You've been there all morning? Well, you're either unapproachable, or nobody knows you work there. Me? I'm fine. How's yourself, Ed? That's good. Huh? Oh, nothing much lately. Same old grind. They keep me pretty busy over here. What's new? Nothing much with me either. No, I've been catching up on my sleep. No. Nope. Nn, nn. Seen Jack? Oh, he has? Well, why don't you run up some night? Yeah. Sure. I'd like to, Ed. Been keeping my nose pretty much to the grindstone. No. Okay, Ed. Sure, I'll give you a ring. Okay, Ed. So long. Okay, Okay, Ed. So long."

Eleven-thirty. Guess I'll call up Phil.

"Extension two-nine-three, please. That's right. Hello. Phil? Yeah. Me. Let's go outside for lunch to-day. I'm fed up on that studio restaurant. Yeah, it stinks. How about the Wilshire Brown Derby? Well, suppose we do kill a couple of hours. So what? I'm sick of working my can off every day around here. Meet you at the gate at 12. Okay, Phil. Okay. So long."

Maybe I could get in a couple of pages of dialogue before lunch time. Let's see.

All the events depicted herein are entirely fictitious; the characters of real persons are never knowingly used, and how! An "original" is a story you can't remember where the hell you read. After an idea had been used by three or more studios it became the property of the public domain. How about writing the biography of a story idea? One of the big magazine serial boys comes across it in Montaigne, who got it, probably, from Boccaccio. It is put in up-to-date togs and garnished with parsley and served up to the ladies' home companions. The book hits the best-seller lists, and Kaufman dramatises it for Broadway. Metro buys it. Columbia sneaks it into a picture they're shooting, R.K.O. gives it a new twist, and Warners disguise it in a costume picture. Metro decides to make a musical out of it and calls in Ben Hecht. Universal works it into their latest sea story.

Finally Monogram makes the awful half of a double-feature bill out of it. Oh, well. It's all in fun. Maybe it wasn't an artistic success, but it was certainly B.O. Then the producer calls you up and says we want something new and dynamic, like that picture *The Blue Angel*, with Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich, pronounced Marlayna Daytrish.

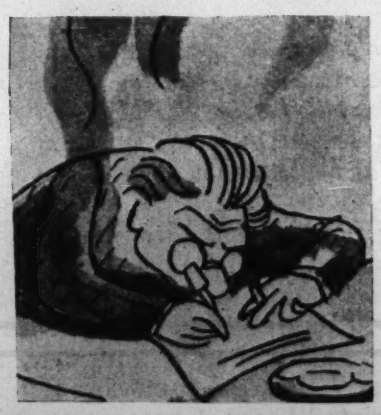
Damn, but the time passes slowly. Might as well go down and play the slot machines and see if I can hit the jackpot while I'm waiting for Phil. No use letting them work your can off. I'll whack out a couple of pages of dialogue this afternoon. This may be a flop at the box office, but it's certainly going to be an artistic success. People just don't know what a script writer is up against. I'll get sore some day and pull stakes the hell out of here and write the Great American Novel—in a pig's eye! Mustn't forget to bum that twenty from Jerry.

Better stick a couple of pages of typescript on top of the desk; make 'em think you've been sweating over the job. Trouble is, once you're pegged at three-fifty, just try and get a raise. Oh, well. It's buttons, but it's better than going hungry.

Holy cripes! I've forgotten to read the *Hollywood Reporter!* Dammit, you just don't get a minute to yourself around this joint.

Some day I'll just get up and walk out on this racket. The trouble with pictures is, they stink.

Oh, well.



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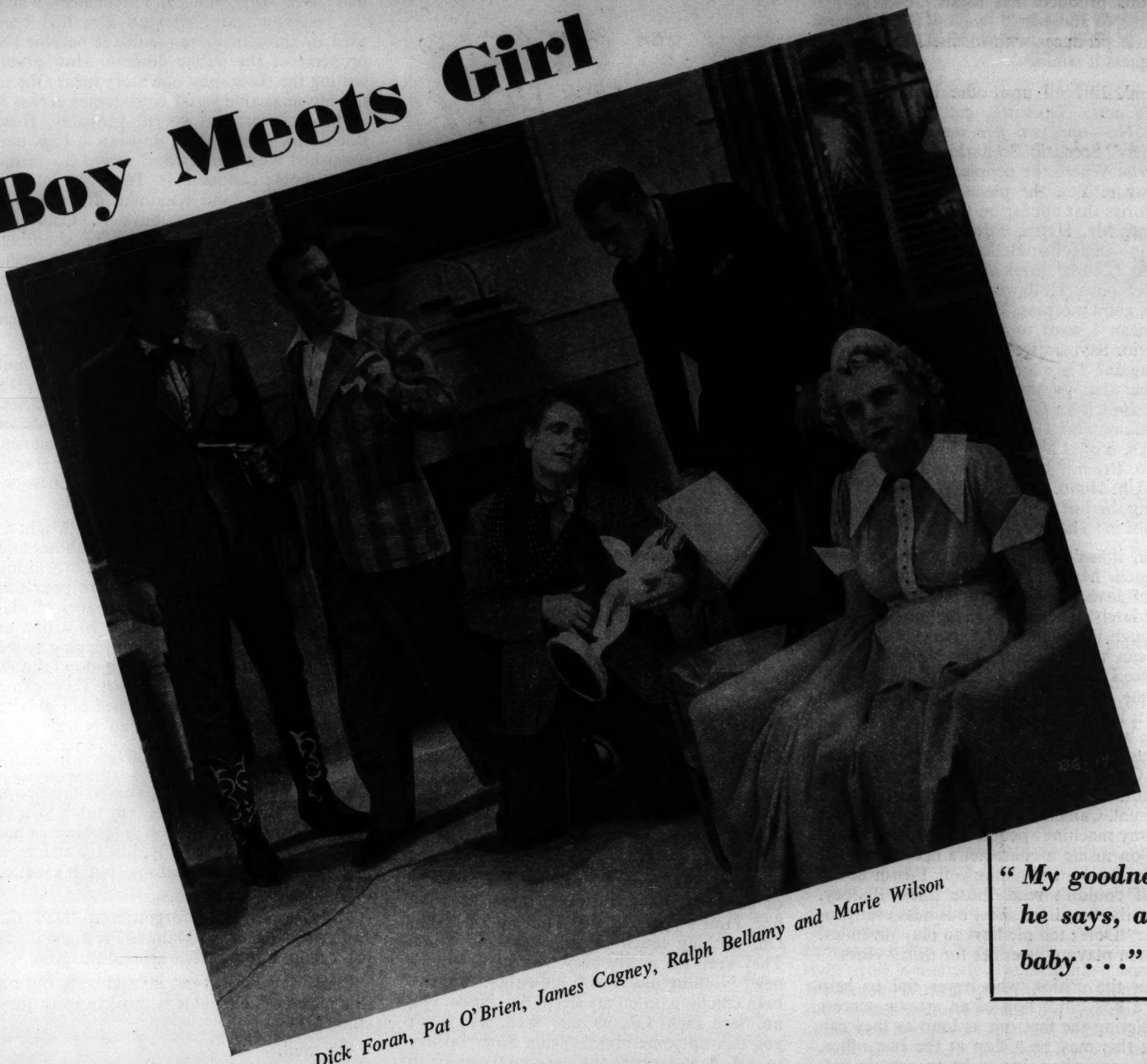
Boy Meets Girl



Dick Foran, Pat O'Brien, James Cagney, Ralph Bellamy and Marie Wilson

" My goodness, he says, a baby . . ."

Robert Law and J. Carlyle Benson, Hollywood script writing team, are discussing with Larry Toms, horse opera star, and Rosetti, his agent, the plot for Larry's next picture. Larry Toms is seated in a chair, listening with a puzzled and dissatisfied expression; Rosetti is standing, biting at a cigar, very intense and vacuous; and Benson is dozing on a couch.

LAW: . . . and this bozo comes up to you and you look him straight in the eye and you say, "Why, darn your soul, I loved her before you ever married her." Then the dame comes in and she cries: "Larry, I heard everything you said." . . . and you just look at her, and there's a long pause—*a long pause*—and then, finally, you say, "*Did you?*" That's all—just a plain, quiet, simple, "Did you?" (*he falls on the couch*). Boy, what a moment!

LARRY: Yeah, but what's the story about?

BENSON: Love.

LAW (*singing*) "Love is the sweetest thing."

LARRY: Now, come on boys—get off the couch. This ain't fair. I got a lot at stake in this picture. It's the last one in my contract. If I get a poor story I'm out in the cold.

LAW: Shivering with a million dollar annuity.

LARRY (*controlling himself*): Tell me your story in a few simple words.

LAW: Mr. Benson, what's our story?

BENSON: How do I know? You told it.

LAW: Didn't you listen?

BENSON: No. We ought to have a stenographer.

LAW: But they won't wear tights. And I can't dictate to a stenographer who won't wear tights.

LARRY: Where's C. Elliot Friday? He's the producer. He ought to be here. I've been listenin' to this story for two hours. What's it about?

LAW: Don't speak to me. You don't like our story.

LARRY: I didn't say I didn't like it. I couldn't follow it.

BENSON: The only thing you could follow is the trail of a lonesome horse.

BENSON: Listen, I've been writing stories for eleven years. Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy gets girl.

LAW: Or—girl meets boy. Girl loses boy. Girl gets boy. Love will find a way. Love never loses. Put your money on love. You can't lose. I'm getting hungry.

ROSETTI: If I make a point, I don't think you're showing the proper respect to one of the biggest stars in this studio.

LARRY: Just because I don't get Dick Powell's fan mail don't mean I ain't got his following. A lot of those that want to write me—ain't never learned how to write.

The Spewack stage success *Boy Meets Girl* has been filmed. James Cagney has returned to Warner Bros. to play Robert Law; Pat O'Brien is J. Carlyle Benson, and Marie Wilson plays Susie.

Last month we published advance stills from the film version of this famous satire on Hollywood. The interest aroused was such that we feel sure our readers will enjoy the extracts printed below from the film script.

★ ★ ★

LAW: Benson, injustice has been done. We've been lacking in respect for the idol of illiteracy.

BENSON: Do we apologise?

LAW: No.

ROSETTI: Well, let me tell you something—before I became an agent I taught diction. And Larry Toms is potentially the greatest actor I ever met. I can prove it—with X-rays. (*He fumbles with his brief-case and extracts X-ray photographs.*) I was just taking them up to show B.K. He's got the Barrymore Larynx. I'll put his larynx alongside of John Barrymore's and I defy you to tell me which is which.

LARRY: I couldn't tell myself and it's my own larynx. (*Rosetti has given the X-rays to Benson.*)

BENSON: Say, are you sure this is his larynx?

ROSETTI: Gentlemen, I wouldn't be surprised with the proper training, if Larry couldn't sing. That opens up the whole field of musicals.

BENSON (*to Law*): What are we waiting for?

LAW: Lunch.

LARRY (*roaring*): I'm getting fed up with this. I got writers who are just plain crazy—a producer who can't concentrate and ain't even here—and—

ROSETTI: Now, now, Larry, don't lose your temper.

LARRY: The idea of writers gettin' fifteen hundred a week for actin' like hoodlums!

LAW: I agree with you.

LARRY: Huh?

LAW: We're not writers. We're hacks. If we weren't, would I be sitting here listening to your inarticulate grunts?

LARRY: Aw.

LAW: That's exactly what I mean. For two cents I'd take the next train back to Vermont.

BENSON: Will you forget Vermont?

LAW (*indicating Larry*): I wouldn't have to sit around with *that* in Vermont. I'd write. Really write.

BENSON: Yeah, I know.

LAW: I wrote once. I wrote a book—a darned good book. I was a promising young novelist. I almost got the Pulitzer prize in 1930. And in 1937 I'm writing dialogue for a *horse!* (*points to Larry.*)

LARRY: Now, listen——

ROSETTI: Larry—Larry, take a deep breath. The boys mean no harm.

ROSETTI: Exhale! (*Larry slowly exhales.*)

LAW (*sniffing*): I smell carbon exhaust.

LARRY: One more crack, that's all—just one more crack.

(*Enter C.F.*)

LARRY: Hello, Mr. Friday. We've been waiting for you. Listen——

C.F.: Good morning, good morning. (*Seating himself at desk.*) Boys, no antics please. We've got a heavy day ahead of us. (*Picks up phone.*) Miss Crews, I don't want to be disturbed by anybody—understand? And order some lunch. A plate of raw carrots, and a bottle of certified raw milk. See that it's *raw*. Bring enough for everybody.

LAW: (*talking into telephone*) Just a minute. Benson and Law want two cups of chicken broth, some ham hocks, cabbage, lemon meringue pie, and some bicarbonate of soda.

C.F.: You're slaughtering yourselves, boys. You won't be able to think with that poison in your stomachs. And we've got to think. I've just seen B.K., boys; this studio is facing a crisis.

ROSETTI: Any truth in the report, C.F., that Elstree-British wants to buy the studio?

C.F.: You know as much about it as I do, Rosetti.

LAW: Why sell? I thought we were sitting pretty. We're in receivership.

ROSETTI: Well, I'm going up to see B.K. I hope you boys get a good story for Larry. (*He goes out.*)

C.F. (*more freely*): As a matter of fact, you may as well know it. There may be a reorganisation.

BENSON: Again?

C.F.: And you know my position. I'm the only college-bred man in the studio. They resent me.

LAW: The big snobs.

C.F.: Just because I've always tried to do something fine, something dignified, something worth while—I'm being hammered on all sides. (*Impressively*) Boys, if my next picture fails, I'm out. And you're out, Larry. And it won't do you two boys any good either. Of course—(*a little bitterly*) you can always write plays.

LAW: I don't see why not. We never wrote any.

C.F.: I have an idea for a play I want to discuss with you some time. You'll be wild about it. Just one set—simple to produce and practically anybody can play it. Katherine Cornell would be marvellous for the girl. She dies in the first act.

LARRY (*angrily*): Listen here, Mr. Friday, I ain't in the theatre. What about my picture.

C.F.: Boys, we need a big picture. Not just a good story. I want to do something fine—with sweep, with scope—stark, gripping—but with plenty of laughs and a little hokum. Something we'll be proud of. Not just another, but *the* picture of the year. A sort of Charge of the Light Brigade, but as Kipling would have done it.

Susie the waitress, enters, carrying the lunch.

LAW (*running to her*): Lunch!

BENSON: Grub! Susie, I love you.

C.F.: Wait a minute—wait a minute——

(*Benson takes tray from Susie.*)

SUSIE (*weakly*): Please, Mr. Benson, be careful.

LAW: Put that tray right down here.

SUSIE: Thanks—it's not very heavy (*she then collapses on the floor*).

C.F.: Good gad!

LAW (*bending over Susie*): Susie—Susie—

BENSON (*excitedly into phone*): Get the doctor over here right away.

LAW: Somebody give me water—

C.F. (*looking down disapprovingly*): This is a nice thing to happen in my office. Who is this girl, anyway?

LAW (*giving glass of water to Susie*): Come on, Susie (*lifts her head to glass*).

LARRY: That commissary shouldn't employ people with epilepsy.

C.F.: I had an actor who did that to me once. Held up my shooting schedule fourteen days.

SUSIE (*opening her eyes*): Did you all get napkins?

BENSON: Now Susie—get into this chair.

SUSIE: Thank you.

C.F.: What's wrong with you, young lady?

SUSIE: Nothing. I'm much better now. Thanks.

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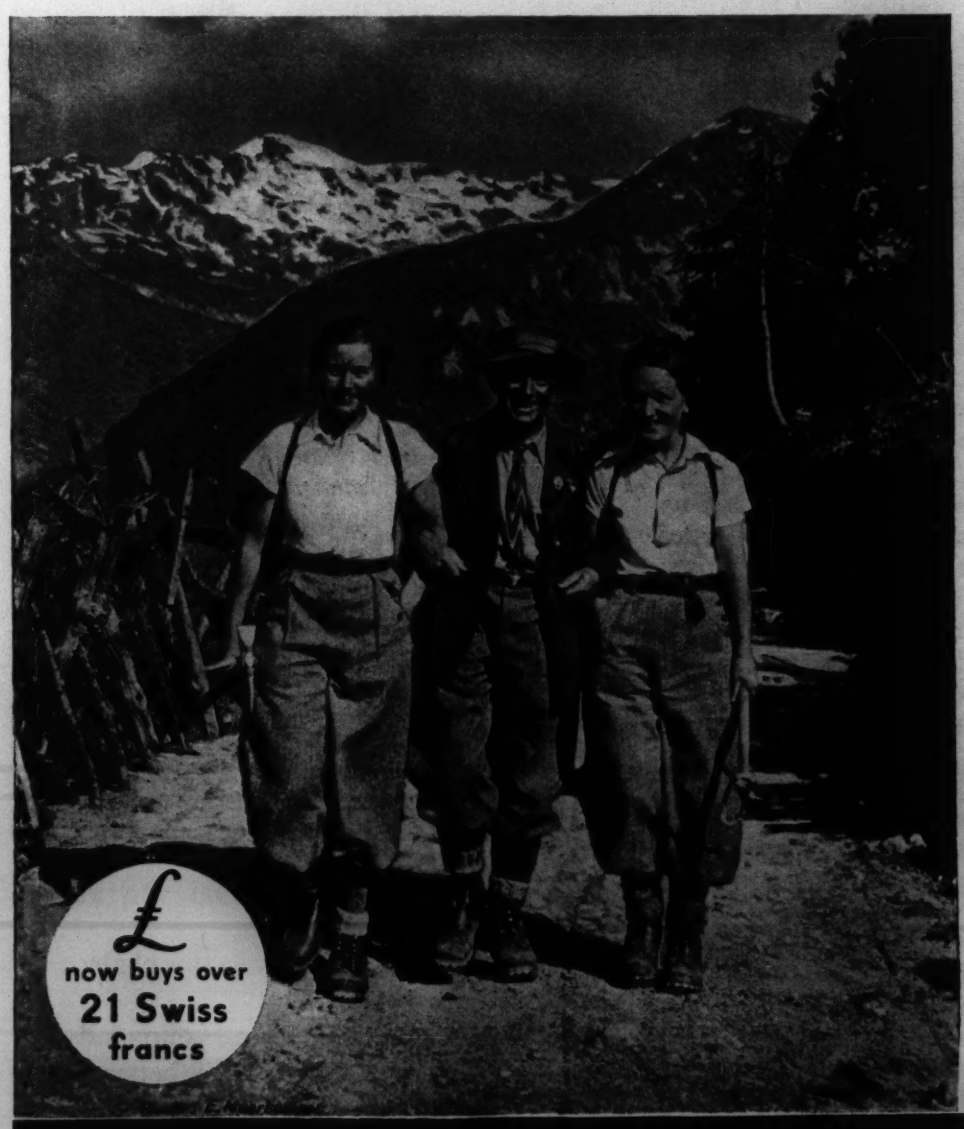

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C.F.: Where's that doctor?

SUSIE: Did you call for a doctor? You didn't have to.

C.F.: Do you get these epileptic fits often?

SUSIE: I didn't have an epileptic fit.

C.F.: Then what's wrong with you?

SUSIE: There's nothing wrong—it's only natural.

C.F.: Only natural for you to come into my office and collapse on the floor?

SUSIE: Oh, no, sir. It's only natural when you're going to have a baby.

C.F. (*into phone*): Tell that doctor not to come—You heard me—I don't want him (*hangs up*). I won't have my office converted into a maternity ward! I don't think much of your husband—letting you work at a time like this!

(*It is clear that Susie has no husband*).

SUSIE (*rising*): You'd better eat your lunch before it gets cold. Have you all got napkins?

BENSON: Take it easy, Susie.

LAW: The new generation! "You'd better eat your lunch," she says. "It's only natural," she says. Susie, you are magnificent.

SUSIE: I'm quitting at the end of the week so I thought I'd tell everybody why. I wouldn't want them to think I was discontented.

LAW: Our little mother! Our little mother!

SUSIE: Oh, don't make fun of me.

LAW: Fun? I've never been so touched in my life. Susie I feel purified.

BENSON: Susie—can we be god-father?

SUSIE: Do you mean it?

BENSON: Do we mean it? Just say "yes", and see how quick I get Mark Hellinger to print: "Benson and Law are god-fathering in June!"

SUSIE: Oh, I think that would be wonderful for Happy to have writers for a god-father.

BENSON: Happy?

SUSIE: I'm going to call him Happy—even if he's a girl. Because I want him to be happy—even if he's a girl.

BENSON: Beautiful! A beautiful thought! Where are you going to have this baby, Susie?

SUSIE: In the County Hospital. It's all fixed. I was very lucky because I've only lived in the county three months and I'm not eligible.

C.F.: Now, listen, boys. I've had enough of this.

LAW (*at phone*): Give me the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital—and make it snappy!

BENSON (*slapping Law on the back*): We've got a baby!

C.F.: Just a minute—hang up that phone!

LAW (*into phone*): Dr. Barx, please. Willy, this is Law of Benson and Law. Reserve the best suite in the house for us. I'm serious! Dead serious. A little friend of ours is going to need you pretty soon, and we want the best service you've got in stock.

BENSON: Day and night nurse.

LAW (*to Benson*): And not the one with the buck teeth, either. She's dynamite. (*Into phone*) We want everything that Joan Blondell had—only double—What's that? Bill? Bill the studio of course.

C.F. You'll do no such thing! What kind of a gag is this?

Miss Crews enters, followed by two men with trumpets.

MISS CREWS: Do you want to hear the trumpet call? The men are here. Music Department wants your O.K.

C.F.: Trumpets?

MISS CREWS: For "Young England".

C.F.: Look here. I haven't time to listen to you now. Come back here at two o'clock. And give it to me from out there. I don't want you blasting in my ear.

MISS CREWS: Yes, Mr. Friday. (*The three exit.*)

C.F.: Now, boys, let's get together on this. (*To Susie.*) And you—what are you sitting here for? Get out!

Susie tries to rise.

LAW (*to Susie*): Sit right where you are. (*At C.F.*) Don't you bark at our inspiration! We've got it!

C.F.: Huh? What?

LAW (*with mounting excitement*): A baby!

C.F.: Boys, I'm a patient man, but you're trying me.

"Our little Mother . . ."

BENSON (*excitedly*): *Larry Toms and a baby!*

LAW (*to C.F.*): Do you see it? He is startled.

LARRY: Wait a minute—wait a minute—

LAW: He finds a baby in the Rockies—

BENSON: Girl with a no-good gambler—out of Las Vegas—has a baby—gambler is killed. Girl leaves baby on ranger's doorstep. Larry is the ranger—He finds the baby.

BENSON: A baby!

LAW: My goodness, he says, 'a baby!'

BENSON: The most precious thing in life!

LAW: The cutest goldarn little thumbsucker you ever saw—

BENSON: Tugging at every mother's heart—and every potential mother—

LAW: And who isn't?

BENSON: A love story between Larry and the baby!

LAW: The Two Outcasts!

BENSON: And then he meets the mother—

LAW: She wants her baby back.

BENSON: She's reached the end of her tether.

LAW: She hasn't even got a tether.

BENSON: The man she loved—let her down. She hates men—all men.

LAW: She won't look at Larry.

BENSON: No—there she sits—bitter, brooding, cynical—but underneath a mother's heart.

LAW: Out on the Rockies—

BENSON: The heck with the Rockies! He's in the Foreign Legion!

LAW: Right! Larry's joined to forget. He's out on the march. We can use all that stock stuff. And he finds a baby—

BENSON: He's gone off to fight the Riffs.

LAW: The heck with the Riffs! Ethiopians!

BENSON: Stick to the Riffs. We don't want any race problems.

LAW: She doesn't know if he's coming back—

BENSON: She's waiting—waiting—

LAW: Cut to the Riffs. Cut back—into the battle. His father's Colonel—

BENSON: Talk about Kipling—

LAW: Talk about scope—sweep—what a set-up!

BENSON: A love story!

LAW: A great love story! (*enraptured*) The Virgin of the Foreign Legion and the West Point man who wanted to forget!

BENSON: The baby brings them together, splits them apart, brings them together—

LAW: Boy meets girl—

BENSON: Boy loses girl—

LAW: Boy gets girl—

C.F. springs up and bangs desk.

C.F.: Boys, I think you've got something! Let's go up and try it on B.K. while it's hot.

Larry strides forward, advancing on C.F.

LARRY: Wait a minute! You can't act with a baby. They steal every scene.

LAW: Are you selling motherhood short?

* * *

(*They go to B.K., head of the studio.*)

LAW: The Cowboy and the Baby!

BENSON: The sweetest story ever told!

LAW: Combines the best features of motherhood and horse-operas.

C.F.: I suppose we could get Baby LeMaire. He's about due for a comeback.

LAW: *That* has been? Nonsense—that's the point of the whole thing—we're going to have a new-born baby.

BENSON: Brand new.

LAW: We're going to watch that baby—the first hair—the first tooth—the first smile—

BENSON: The same baby—no switching. First time in the history of pictures. That baby's going to grow before your eyes.

LAW: Open up like a flower—

BENSON: Minute he's born we set the cameras on him.

B.K.: He ain't *born* yet? Can I make a contract with a possibility?

LARRY: The whole idea's crazy. Do you expect a big star like me to support a baby?

BENSON: You've supported a whole lot of horses. This is a step up.

LAW: Can't you see it, B.K.? The publicity angle along—Imagine the headlines!—"A Star Is Born!"

BENSON: That's a good title, Law. Too bad they just used it.

LAW: The baby's going to gurgle and google and drool his way to stardom.

B.K. (*after slight deliberation*): Boys, I think you've got something . . . .

SMALL TOWN MAN

Walt Disney's rise to screen fame told by H. E. BLYTH

With the completion of his first full-length film, "Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs," Walt Disney reached the highest point in his screen career.

Here is an exclusive sketch of his life and work, of his early difficulties and problems; of his first attempts at film-cartooning, and his rise from peanut pedlar to screen cartoonist number one.

And something, too, about the moneyed interests behind the cheery little figure of Mickey Mouse. Born of the memory of a studio mouse caught and tamed, the little mouse in a pair of gay, rakish, red pants now represents a considerable dollar turnover, the possible effects of which are discussed in this article.

THE time is not yet ripe for a biography of Walt Disney. At this present moment, in the late nineteen-thirties, his career, it must seem to many, has only just begun.

New developments, in colour and sound, may be just around the corner; new ideas, new fantasies and new characters have yet to be born. The next five or ten years may well see revolutionary changes in his work. Yet to some critics of the cinema his star seems on the wane, the first fine flush of joyous comedy and delicate fantasy already spent. We can as yet only speculate as to who is right. *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs*, his first full-length picture, by its success may well prove the beginning of a new phase in film cartoons, a phase that may bring to our cinemas whole programmes in which the figures are but the creations of man's imagination, or by its failure may kill much of the promise that these cartoons now hold.

But one point remains certain. If Disney were to cease production to-morrow, his place would be secure in the history of the film. His little comedies and fantasies could be projected in years to come and give as much pleasure as they do to-day, and Mickey's ingenuity, the bravado of the Three Little Pigs and Donald Duck's raucous squawk have already attained film immortality.

"Mickey Mouse," said Low, cartoonist of *The Evening Standard*, when introducing a lecturer on Disney's work, "is the only public figure in the world to-day who is universally beloved." Therein lies much of the greatness of Disney's work—he can bring pleasure to people of all classes, all nationalities and all ages. Whether it be Mickey Mouse, Michel

Souris, Michael Maus or Miguel Ratonocito who appears on the screen, he can still command shouts of delight from the audience, for Disney, even more than Chaplin, has discovered the secret of international appeal. That is not to say that he may not lose it—satire, especially of the American scene, will not be universally understood, and satire, if it becomes bitter, may in the end prove his undoing, just as it nearly proved the undoing of Clair; but so long as he retains his kindliness, his simplicity and his wonderful sense of fun, he and Mickey Mouse will remain two of the world's most beloved characters.

There are other cartoonists in the cinema, and much of their work is good and not a little excellent, but they all must realise that Disney is their master in ingenuity, in fantasy and in the personality of the characters he creates. It would be absurd to contrast Stinkie the Skunk or Oswald the Rabbit with Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse; they are but nonentities compared to the inhabitants of Disney's little world. Only Pop-Eye The Sailor has the individuality of a Disney character, but Pop-Eye is only one, and Disney has created a dozen personalities equally unique, such as the Three Little Pigs, the Big Bad Wolf, the Goof, and that most well-meaning and effusive of hounds, Pluto.

The standard he has set for himself is so high, with little masterpieces like *Lullaby Land*, *Three Little Pigs*, *The Band Concert*, and the truly exquisite *Water Babies*, that he must inevitably fall far below this standard, by comparison, in much of his work.

His present output of eighteen pictures a year—nine Mickey Mouse cartoons and nine Silly Symphonies—makes sustained brilliance quite impossible. We could wish that they might be limited to half that number, but the demands of cinemas all over the world make that impossible. But mediocrity is a dangerous canker in any artist's work. It may spread and one day envelope the whole. Granted that, to a degree, it is inevitable, its presence is yet alarming.

Disney and his studio are a part of a commercialised, money-making industry which has little time for fantasies and fairies unless they have box-office appeal. To the writer nothing in the cinema is more saddening than the knowledge of the enormous vested interests paraded behind the friendly, good-natured little figure of Mickey Mouse. Over three hundred firms in Europe and America have used Mickey to increase sales turnover, and have found his power in this respect amazingly successful; Mickey Mouse books have been wonderfully successful, the story of the Three Little Pigs being published in three different languages, while the *Mickey Mouse Weekly* has a circulation which would shame many a famous periodical. Connected to the Disney organisation, especially to the commercial side, are many very shrewd financial brains. They could not tell you anything about the artistic value of a Silly Symphony, but they know to a sixpence the trade value of Mickey's face on a firm's goods. The ugly shadow of the dollar looms up behind that cheery little form.

To understand Disney's work, it is necessary to know something of his life and character, since the reasons for his love of simplicity, of fantasy and of animals become easy to understand when considered in the light of his childhood and upbringing. He has been described as "a small town man, who has read very little, seen very little, heard very little." That is an important point to be remembered when discussing the satirical side of his work.

Here is no city "slicker" who may delight in gibing at the weaknesses of his fellows, for he is still essentially "a small town man" whose delight is in simple things. Of slight build and average height (5ft. 8in. to be exact), with light brown hair and dark brown eyes, he is a shy, unimposing figure with little love for the limelight and personal publicity. His is a dual personality, for besides being himself, he is also Mickey Mouse. To him these are two entirely different entities. When he adopts that funny, squeaky voice and nervous little laugh, bashfully courting the tantalising Minnie or sternly telling Pluto to behave, it is not Disney that speaks but Mickey himself. He ceases to be Disney but becomes instead a small mouse with a kindly heart and goodwill to all men.

Actually the two are not so very different. Mickey, when all is said and done, is not a very imposing fellow, any more than is Disney, and although he is far more quick-witted and ingenious than Pluto or the Goof, he has never had Donald Duck's swagger, bounce and conceit. You could probably impose upon both, but both have determination and neither know when they are beaten; fate has given each of them some hard knocks, and both have always come up smiling.

Disney has always, and probably will always, be "broke." All the money he earns goes back into the business. His brother Roy is his financial adviser, and he it is who handles the business administration of the studio. Yet despite his lack of interest in money matters, Disney has a strange knack of being right, a fact of which his studio is now well aware, since the making of both coloured Silly Symphonies in general and the *Three Little Pigs* in particular were both strongly opposed by members of his staff.

Walt Disney was born in Chicago on December 5th, 1901, of an Irish-Canadian father and a German-American mother. He has three brothers and one sister, none of whom have ever evinced any interest in art. Possibly he inherited his love of fantasy and his imagination from the mixture of German and Irish in his blood, the Grimm tradition in his mother allied with the nimbleness of Irish thought, although neither of his parents were in any way artistically inclined, but whatever the reason, Disney as a boy had always but two ambitions—either to become an artist or to go on the stage.

His grammar school days started in a country school in Marceline, Missouri, and were continued at Benton Grammar School in Kansas City, spiritual home of the Middle West, and later at the McKinley High School in Chicago. In Kansas City, from the age of nine to fifteen, Disney delivered newspapers from 3.30 to 6 a.m. every morning before going to school, but despite these long hours he found time to interest himself in matters apart from work and education, and while at Benton he did Charlie Chaplin impersonations at neighbourhood theatres, and won cash prizes amounting to a dollar or even two! Like René Clair, admiration for Chaplin has played an important part in his screen career.

Much of his early life seems to have been spent alternating between Kansas City and Chicago. In the McKinley High School he attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts night school, and studied cartooning under Leroy Gossitt, then of the old *Chicago Herald* staff.

In 1917, he began work as a newsboy and general pedlar on a train running out of Kansas City, selling peanuts, candy and magazines, and balancing precariously on the steps of the train as it pulled in and out of the stations.

In the summer of 1918, when the war had brought about a shortage of labour, Disney got a job in Chicago as a postman, but in September of that year he joined the American Red Cross as a chauffeur, after a wholesale rejection by the Enlistment offices for being too young (he was still not yet seventeen), and, after a short period of training, was sent to France, where he stayed for a year.

By the autumn of 1919 he was back in Kansas City, and it is here, with his employment by the Gray Advertising Company of that city, drawing hens and eggs for agricultural catalogues, that his career may be said to begin. Within a few months he had been "fired", but after one or two reversals he started work for the Kansas City Slide Co., making animated advertising films, and experimenting in his spare time in a little home-made studio in his father's garage. His employer at the slide company, A. V. Cauger, gave his blessing to these nocturnal experiments, and in due course the very first Disney cartoon, *Red Riding Hood*, came into being in these restricted surroundings. History does not relate what that cartoon was like—an enterprising cinema-owner could cause something of a flutter if he could discover a print of it and show it to-day—and we do not know how it compared with the Red Riding Hood of the Silly Symphonies. Was the Big Bad Wolf as ferocious and cunning as his polo-playing successor, did his jaws drip and his teeth gnash as alarmingly, and was his discomfiture in the end as complete? And did any of those who saw that early work ever pause to consider what the future of this young man might be? Did any foresee a Disney studio in Hollywood making cartoons that lasted only seven minutes on the screen, yet which cost £10,000 to make and were shown in cinemas all over the world? Probably not, for although Disney threw up his regular job when *Red Riding Hood* was completed, and although he did get some encouragement from certain firms, and formed a company of his own to produce fairy tale cartoons, by the summer of 1923 he was practically penniless and his future in Kansas City seemed blank.

In August he shook its dust from his feet and set out for Hollywood with his train-fare, an old suit (full of holes), a sweater and about forty dollars in cash. Another young man had gone West to seek his fortune.

With him went his brother Roy, a comparative plutocrat with no less than 250 dollars to his credit.

The Seven Dwarfs [*RKO Radio*]

Now animated cartoons were no novelty in the cinema at that time. We are told that as early as 1906 a Yorkshireman, J. Stuart Blackton, made a cartoon comedy called *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* for the Vitagraph Company, and by 1911 Windsor McCay, a prolific and most painstaking artist, was drawing as many as 4,000 pictures for his cartoons in order to get smoothness of movement, and it was McCay who, in the summer of 1918, produced a topical cartoon of 25,000 drawings depicting the sinking of the *Lusitania*. In 1917 Max Fleischer started the *Out of the Inkwell* series and created his famous Koko the Clown, and Koko and Pat Sullivan's Felix the Cat were probably the most famous cartoon characters of the early post-war cinema. Fleischer's work was a combination of photo and cartoon, of real human beings and cartoon characters, a system later adopted by Disney in his "Alice" series.

Meanwhile, William B. Hearst, of the International Feature Syndicate, a great advocate of the "comic strip," placed Gregory La Cava, the famous director, in charge of an Animated Cartoon section, and under his leadership were produced *Jerry on the Job*, *Bringing Up Father*, *Krazy Kat* and other pictures. Also to this period, 1917–1920, belong the *Mutt and Jeff* series, made by Budd Fisher, and *The Terry Cartoon Burlesques*.

So when Disney arrived in Hollywood with his forty dollars, his suit full of holes, his sweater and high hopes, he was bringing no novelty to the film colony. Animated cartoons were already well known to cinema managers, serving either as "fillers" in a programme, oddments thrown in to make the session last the required length of time, or else (if they were bad enough) as "chasers", since the poverty of their inspiration forced a reluctant audience out of the cinema and room was thus made for others.

So in Hollywood Disney made little progress, and it was not until a copy of one of his cartoons was sent to New York (he could not afford to take it himself) that things began to look brighter. Winkler, an independent distributor, engaged him to make cartoons, and the "Alice" series, based on *Alice in Wonderland*, was begun. During his association with Winkler, Disney made over sixty "Alice" cartoons, and later, in 1927, a cartoon animal character was born (for Alice was a real little girl who merely played in a cartoon world), and Oswald the Rabbit came into being. Twenty-six Oswald cartoons were made, and then Winkler and Disney quarrelled. Oswald had done well and Disney hoped for more money for improvement, but to this Winkler would not agree. The partnership had lasted four years, and when the split came Disney and his wife were in New York and his brother Roy was managing his affairs in Hollywood. Winkler took several of the best men from Disney's organisation and started in on his own, producing a second series of Oswald cartoons. Oswald is still to be seen in Walter Lantz's cartoons, which are released by Universal, a pleasant enough little fellow but with none of the personality with which Disney could have endowed him.

On the train back from New York to Hollywood, Mickey Mouse was born. Disney had always had a fondness for mice, and when he was working in Kansas City he used often to catch them in the waste-paper baskets around the studio, and would keep them in a cage on his desk. One little mouse was far tamer than the rest and he it was who sowed the seeds of a mouse cartoon series in Disney's mind.

On that train going back to Hollywood after the split with Winkler, Disney and his wife did some hard thinking. The situation was serious in the extreme. A new character was needed, a new personality whom the great movie-going public would at once take to their heart. And as the train reached the Middle-West, and memories came back of Kansas City and his little friends in the studio there, a mouse was born, a mouse in a pair of gay and rakish red-velvet pants with two enormous pearl buttons in the front, and by the time Los Angeles was reached, the first scenario had been written. Mickey Mouse had arrived and the world was completely unconcerned!

Not that he was even then called Mickey Mouse. Mortimer Mouse was the name originally adopted, and it was only later that it was discarded as being unsuitable.

Disney had still one or two Oswald cartoons to make under contract for Winkler, and the first Mickey Mouse had to be made in secret in consequence, so Disney's garage at his home was used privately as Mickey's studio.

But no sooner was Mickey born than another bombshell came to wreck Disney's plans, and not only Disney's but those of nearly every producer in Hollywood. "Mammy," wailed Al Jolson, "Oh, Mammy," and before anyone quite knew what had happened sound had arrived and the days of silent pictures were gone.

The first Mickey cartoon was completed and sent to New York, where the furore caused by *The Jazz Singer* was still at its height. Mickey, of course, was silent and nobody would look at him. The greatest star since Chaplin was hawked around the town and the producers to a man turned him down.

Meanwhile a second Mickey cartoon was being made in the Disney garage, but it became increasingly obvious that it must be synchronised with sound if it was to have a chance. Everyone was sound crazy and so it was decided that Mickey must talk. This synchronisation could not be done in Hollywood, and so, in August of 1928, a print of the third Mickey cartoon to be made, *Steamboat Willie*, was taken to New York by Disney, and after much difficulty and many disappointments (the cost of sound was prohibitive in those days) he met the good-natured Irishman, Pat Powers, who agreed to put sound to the film for a price that seemed reasonable and within Disney's slender means. The first synchronisation was disastrous, but after a little experimenting a very satisfactory result was obtained.

Distributors became interested at once, but a hitch arose when Disney refused to sell out his organisation (which then consisted of some twenty-five people, several of whom had originally worked for him in Kansas City). He wished to retain his individuality, and this

desire has been one of the greatest foundations for his success. He was determined to be independent and able to spend whatever he thought necessary on his work. He would not be hampered by studio policies.

Still, on September 19th, 1928, *Steamboat Willie* opened at the Colony Theatre in New York and caused a sensation. The Press were delighted and within a week it had moved to the Roxy Theatre. Even so it was impossible for Disney to make a deal on his own terms, so he decided to release Mickey on the independent market with the help and financial backing of Powers.

On his return to Hollywood, Disney decided to strike out on a new line, since both he and Powers were of the opinion that another series besides Mickey's should be produced, and thus the two series could be run in competitive houses. And so the first Silly Symphony was made, and in February, 1929, another Mickey, *The Opry House* and the first Silly Symphony, *The Skeleton Dance*, built on a musical theme, the "Danse Macabre", were taken to New York for sound recording. *The Opry House*, in which Mickey played Rachmaninoff's Prelude on the piano, was quite a success, but the Silly Symphony was not well received by cinema managers, who considered it far too gruesome. In the end it made its début in a Los Angeles cinema in July, 1929, and it, also, was an immediate success. This led to a booking at the Roxy Theatre in New York, and so by the summer of 1929 the position of both Mickey Mouse and the Silly Symphonies was secure.

At the beginning of 1930, Disney allowed Columbia to release his pictures, which they did until the summer of 1932, when they were then released by United Artists. In 1936 Disney signed for release by RKO.

AFTER the success of Mickey Mouse and the Silly Symphonies in 1929, everything went smoothly for a year or two. Then Disney got a bee in his bonnet, or so it seemed to his studio staff. Colour began to attract him more and more. He had always wanted to make coloured cartoons, and by 1931 the idea was no longer an impracticable dream. Colour fascinated him. Here again he was not first in the field. The first cartoon in Technicolor (then a two-colour process) appeared in the introductory sequence to *The King of Jazz* on March 30th, 1930, and the first colour cartoon proper was Ted Eshbaugh's *Goofy Goat*, a complete cartoon story done in Multicolor and shown for the first time on July 6th, 1931.

The studio could not see eye to eye with Disney over this matter of colour. To begin with the cost of colouring cartoons was considerable and there seemed little chance of getting back the original outlay. Secondly the black-and-white cartoons were doing very nicely and extensive bookings had been made. Those who had booked cartoons in advance would probably be indignant if asked to pay more because some were to be made in colour.

Thirdly, and most important of all, the studio hadn't the capital.

But Disney persisted. The money question; he realised, was the chief problem. Then he thought of a little nest-egg which he had been accumulating against a rainy day. A subsidiary company, formed to market the rights for making Mickey Mouse dolls and toys, had made quite a handsome profit. Here was the money for colour. In the end the studio gave in. If the boss had set his heart on a colour cartoon, then let a colour cartoon be made.

It was made, was a Silly Symphony in Technicolor called *Flowers and Trees*, and was first shown in Hollywood on July 15th, 1932; it still remains one of the best things Disney has done. Nevertheless, it caused no great stir at the time, and although well received there seemed no reason to suppose that the coloured cartoon would in due course supersede the black-and-white entirely.

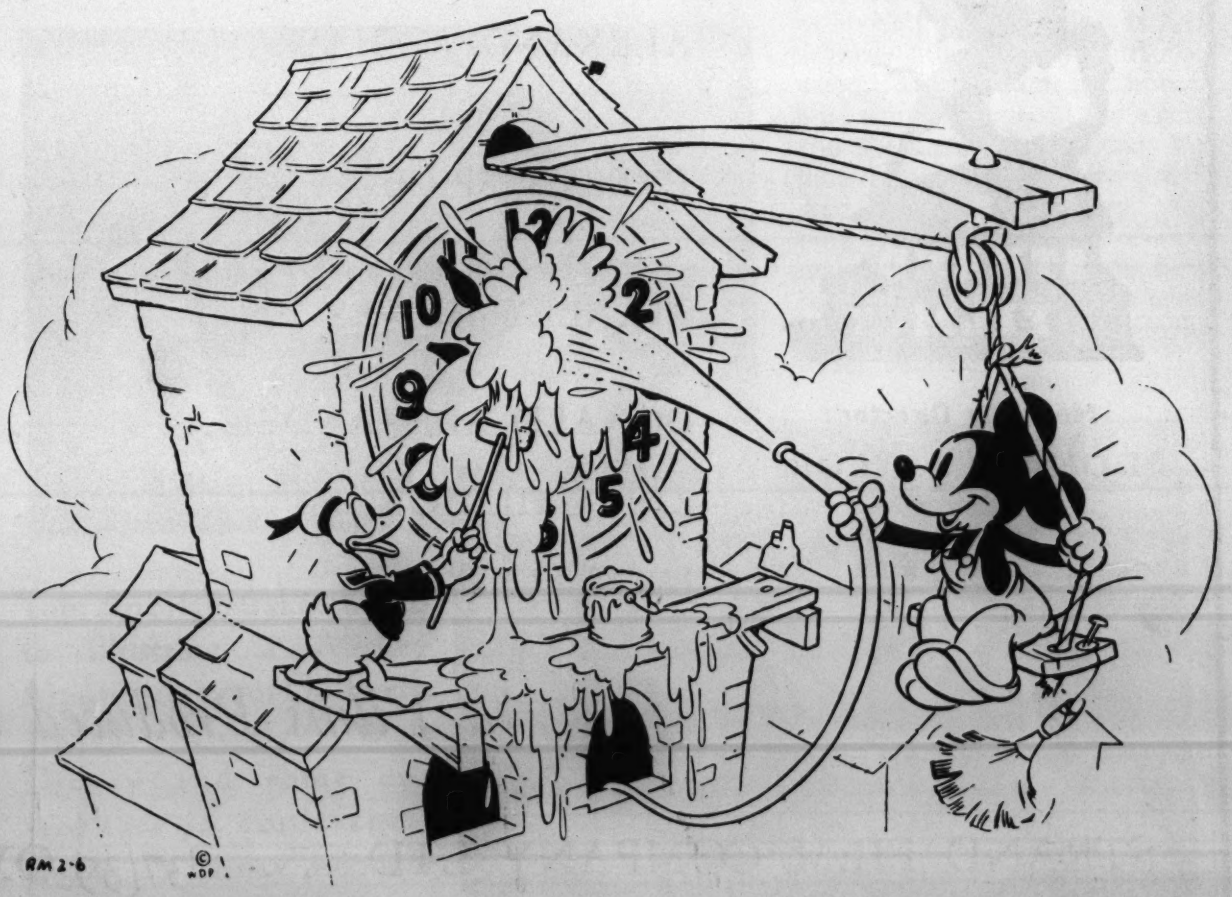
Two more coloured Silly Symphonies followed—*King Neptune* and *Babes in the Wood*—and then Disney got another bee in his bonnet. It buzzed and buzzed, and Disney repeatedly put forward his suggestion to the studio, who as often rejected it (for the Disney Studio is essentially run on a communalistic basis, and his ideas are rejected like anyone else's, if the staff do not consider them promising).

But Disney could not relinquish this new idea. Once again the staff gave in. If he had really set his heart on making a cartoon about three little pigs, then they might as well make one about three little pigs and make him happy. Frank Churchill, the studio's chief composer and conductor, since the advent of sound, wrote a little ditty to go with the film called "Who's afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?" It was destined to become the first song hit ever to come from an animated cartoon.

Three Little Pigs was made, and had its première at Radio City Music Hall in May, 1933. Unlike the first Mickey Mouse, it caused no immediate sensation. The audience laughed, but not immoderately. But then, like a snowball, its popularity began to grow. When it was generally released it seemed to sweep through both America and England. The snowball grew bigger and bigger until it reached truly amazing proportions. People went to see those Three Little Pigs again and again. Everyone began to sing or hum or whistle Frank Churchill's little melody. Dance bands played it all over the world. It made £50,000 in three months and is still being shown and is still making money.

In ten years' time cinemas will still be showing it and audiences will still be hugging themselves in delight at the triumph of those three fat and pink little porkers over the villainous wolf. He will still be huffing and puffing and blowing their house down, and the portrait of a string of sausages, labelled "Father", will still be hanging on the wall of the wisest little pig who built his house of bricks. And the other little pig, who had put the mat with "Welcome" written on it outside his front-door, will still have time, after he has taken refuge in his house, to open the door and pointedly take the mat in when chased by the wolf—one of the most glorious gestures the cinema has produced and comparable to Chaplin's flick of his cigarette-end as he goes to prison. What pleasure that little picture must have given to people all over the world!

The next step was to produce Mickey Mouse himself in colour (until then it had only been used in the Silly Symphonies), and at the beginning of 1935 the full glory of those red velvet pants and the true magnificence of the pearl buttons burst upon a delighted world. Not that they were at first apparent in his début in colour, when he was discovered in a long military cloak and high hat, conducting the William Tell overture in *The Band Concert*, probably the funniest "short" comedy that has ever been made; but once Mickey and his friends had taken the plunge it soon became apparent that the black-and-white cartoons had served their purpose. In



"The Clock Cleaners" [*Mickey Mouse-RKO Radio*]

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1935 they were discontinued altogether.

But the greatest and most important landmark in Disney's career has yet to be dealt with. As early as 1934 Disney had started working on his first full-length cartoon in colour, *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the most ambitious project he had ever attempted. No time or trouble was spared to make it a success, the fact that it was not destined for completion until 1937 being proof of this. The animation of little Snow-White was considerably in advance of any of Disney's other human figures who had appeared in his Silly Symphonies from time to time (and who had not been very convincing), and the cost of production was far in advance of anything that the studio had ever done before. An ordinary coloured Silly Symphony or Mickey Mouse costs about £10,000 to make and lasts about seven minutes on the screen. The cost of *Snow-White* has been put at anything between ten and twenty times that figure, and its effect on the film industry may well be revolutionary.

In 1935 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood selected Disney's *The Tortoise and the Hare* as the best cartoon of 1934, and in the following year chose *Three Orphan Kittens* as the best cartoon of 1935; *The Country Cousin* completed the treble in 1936. Since the Academy's selections have seldom met with universal approval, their awards in Disney's case need only be mentioned for the honour they confer (it was absurd to suppose that any other cartoonist could ever have been considered as a competitor) and their choice need not be discussed here.

The Tortoise and the Hare was undoubtedly one of his happiest inspirations, but it is a little difficult to understand why the other two were considered so outstanding.

One further point should be mentioned before leaving the subject of Disney's career and turning to a consideration of his work.

As he showed by his refusal to sell out his organisation after the success of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928, Disney has always been determined that his studio should retain its individuality, and that it should not be influenced by exterior Hollywood influences. What he and his staff wish to do, they do; if a picture is made which does not altogether satisfy them it is scrapped, even if it seems a good box-office proposition, and, as in the case of *Snow-White*, they are prepared to experiment even if there seems a likelihood of their losing money. Disney has not much use for the rest of Hollywood (the significance of *Mickey's Polo Team* should not be ignored), and he does not wish his work to become contaminated by Hollywood's factory methods.

At the present time his rivals, if such they may be called, are few and have yet to show that joyous appreciation of fun and fantasy which has made Disney supreme. From the start they were handicapped in the matter of colour by Disney's exclusive rights in the use of the Technicolor process, and have had to wait until his patent ran out before using it themselves. Moreover, they have shown themselves unable to create characters which have the personality and popular appeal of Disney's little people, and their draughtsmanship has always been greatly inferior. Of these rival cartoons the best are probably those produced by Max Fleischer for Paramount, the "Color Classics" after the style of the Silly Symphonies, and the series in which the notorious Pop-Eye The Sailor, that voracious eater of spinach, is the principal character. (The writer has often wondered whether spinach vendors have some mysterious influence in Hollywood, so persistent is the free advertisement given to this particular vegetable by the Californian studios.)

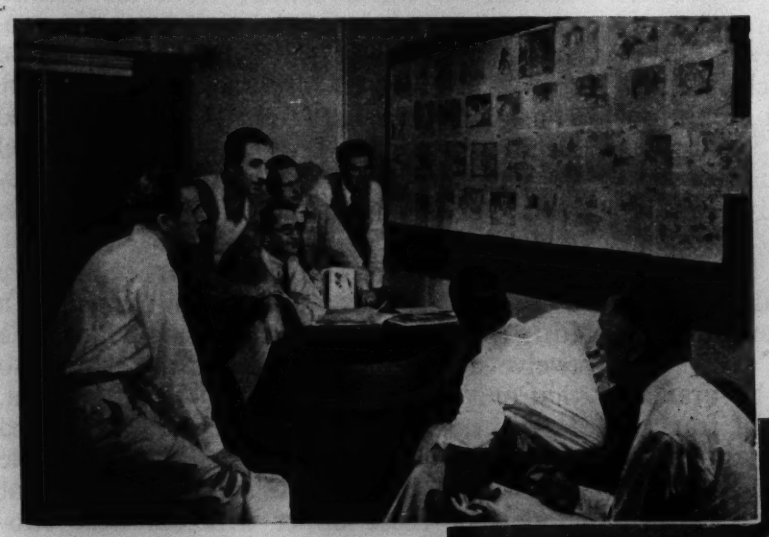
Pop-Eye, whose remarkable bass voice actually emanates from the throat of Billy Costello, the music-hall artist, is a notable figure whose adventures are always entertaining, and he has undoubtedly a forceful personality with a touch of the W. C. Fields pattern about him, for, like Fields, he is given to muttering inaudibly to himself. The Fleischer colour cartoons have also been notable on occasions, and although their colouring has never been in any way comparable to Disney's, they yet possess a pronounced stereoscopic effect which is not seen in Disney's work. This stereoscopic effect was most noticeable in the forest sequence in *The Elephant Never Forgets* and more especially in *Dancing on the Moon*, quite a remarkable and imaginative little work in its way and most effective in its shots of the receding earth. Nearly all Fleischer's coloured cartoons have a popular theme song as a background of sound, and the *Love in Bloom* music and the picturesque settings of *Time for Love* would have made this quite a noteworthy effort had the colouring not seemed so inferior when compared to that of a Silly Symphony.

Besides these, many of the big film companies seem to release cartoons of one kind or another, none of them outstanding. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, for example, have a series, *Happy Harmonies*, depicting the adventures of "Stinkie", the skunk, produced by Harman-Ising; Universal have the *Oswald the Rabbit* series already referred to; 20th Century-Fox distribute *Terry Toons*, featuring "Kiko the Kangaroo," and produced by Paul Terry; and besides Pop-Eye, Paramount also release a *Betty Boop* series in black-and-white.

In this country Reunion Films distribute the Anson Dyer cartoons based on Stanley Holloway's "Old Sam."

From them Disney has little to fear. His name is so well-known that to the majority of the film-going public the others simply do not count, with the unfortunate result for Disney that many film audiences are apt to assume that all cartoons are Disney cartoons (certainly all coloured ones) and he is often blamed for work that is not his. There seems no likelihood whatsoever of his competitors ever rivalling his skill and artistry, and the only danger seems to lie in the fact that Disney may one day be forced down to their level. But at the moment he is supreme, and remains in a class by himself.

Such, in brief, is Disney's story. Mickey no longer comes to life in a garage, for now his adventures are created in studios as lavishly equipped and as luxuriously fitted as any in Hollywood. Disney's name is a household word throughout the world and the financial resources behind him must be very great. And yet his story may have only just begun. He will always make money—there seems little reason to doubt that—but artistically his future is still hanging in the balance.



Top: An original sketch used to illustrate a Mickey Mouse version of Gulliver's Travels. Centre: Walt Disney and some co-workers in conference. Right: A Disney animator at work.

MAGINOT LINE

(*From the Film 'Double Crime sur la Ligne Maginot'*)

HELLO America: This is the Maginot Line calling. We're "somewhere in France", a little more than 100 feet underground, in the Metz sector of the Line. We can't give you the exact location. A few hours ago, we drove up here—through the peaceful rolling countryside of Lorraine—passed through a delightful bit of woods and walked right into the side of a hill. We passed through big iron doors. Over the doors was a plaque with crossed flags of the Republic of France, underneath was the legend: "*On ne passe pas*" meaning literally: "One does not pass".

We walked along a tunnel for about 75 feet, entered a very comfortable elevator and went down about 100 feet into the ground. We boarded a little electric train (much like the ones used in mines), were carried along for several hundred yards at about 15 miles an hour and here we are—talking to you from the centre of one of the most closely-guarded military secrets in Europe: the Maginot Line. On one side of this line stands France, a nation of just over 40 million inhabitants; on the other side 75 million citizens of the Greater Germany.

This line of fortifications, built by France at a cost of unknown billions of francs, stretches from Belgium to Switzerland. Let me tell you now a little about my immediate surroundings:

This is really a subterranean building. It's comfortable, air-conditioned and has central heating; it's bomb-, shell- and gas-proof. I'm talking from just outside the telephone exchange. It's as big as the switchboard in a modern hotel. Nearby is the hospital and operating-room. Down a short corridor is the kitchen, equipped with the latest electrical labour-saving devices. Across the way are the officers' quarters: they've got nice tiled shower-baths. Just at the corner is a room with blackboards on the wall; that's the control-room from which guns are directed. Remember: all of this is 100 feet underground. Officers and troops spend one week down here and then a week in barracks up on top. The troops, with a humour that is, perhaps, particularly French, call themselves "the moles".

Everything down here is done mechanically: the little electric train carries ammunition and supplies along the corridors until they reach an elevator that takes them up to a point near the surface. You see, the guns, in these forts, are operated as they are in a battleship, the gunner can't see his target, he receives his directions from the control room, his gun is fed by an automatic conveyor and he lays the gun as directed and fires when ordered to do so. These forts are constantly manned and the men eat and sleep down here. I think there is a relief coming up now. Let's listen to them as they pass the door (. . . . *sound of marching feet and troops singing*).

I've been referring to this particular place as a fort, but it certainly doesn't *look* like a fort. I can only ask you to imagine about a twelve-storey building sunk in the ground so that only the roof protrudes—just a few feet. In this case, the roof is steel and reinforced concrete and looks like a series of little cupolas, cleverly camouflaged. It is said that models of these upper defences were subjected to a pounding by 20-inch howitzers at close range—they stood the test, but the strength and thickness were tripled before they were installed.

These cupolas, of course, represent the striking-power of the forts. Everything below is constructed in such a way that both ammunition and men shall always be available to those guns. The communication system underground is duplicated throughout: double systems of telephone lines and lights have been installed, and everything seems to work by electricity. The little electric train has a horn that sounds to me almost exactly like a Paris taxi-cab. I think I hear it coming now—(*sound of train, horn and ringing bell*). Well, there goes the train. That one had eight flat cars, each about six or seven feet long. Incidentally, this underground railway system is a complete unit in itself, it has its signals, sidings, switches and station-master. The train can be carried up to the surface by elevators. They have both "express" and local elevators here.

IF you were to take that train to the exit, you would see some of the most beautiful countryside in this part of France. Green fields, carefully kept woods, apple trees in bloom, a peaceful river winding through the valley. If you looked carefully, you'd see certain mounds that look like overgrown toadstools. On closer inspection, they would turn out to be the cupolas or turrets surmounting these underground forts. These are really the most unobtrusive forts I've ever seen. They house big guns and little guns. Some of them can spring upright to fire and then drop back under their covering.

Now these forts are not in a straight line by any means; they are staggered, or in échelon formation. Most of them can swing round to fire in any direction: trees have been cut down and hills levelled in order to give a clear field of fire. (All this was, of course, done years ago, and the countryside has now resumed its normal appearance.) Every foot of terrain, within the range of the guns has been mapped and charted in those control rooms down in the ground. The aim has been to plan cross-fire for every gun.

If you looked out ahead of this main line, you'd see other and smaller toadstool-looking affairs. Those would be steel and concrete machine-gun emplacements. There are literally hundreds of acres of these toadstools in this sector. You'd have to look care-

Between France and Germany stretches the great fortified tunnel known as the "Maginot Line." Extending from Belgium to Switzerland this great defensive line has been the subject of much interest and speculation.

Here is an on-the-spot description by Edward Murrow and others broadcast from the "Maginot Line" itself. The broadcast was arranged and relayed to America by the Columbia Broadcasting Company.

fully to see them because they're not very obvious. And then, if you looked out beyond that line you'd see something that looked like a dark brown stain winding its way down through the valley and over the crest of the hills to the west. At first glance it would look almost dead sage-brush. If you walked out there you'd find that it's barbed wire entanglements—firmly anchored in the ground—and just beyond the barbed wire you'd see a strange sight: a little forest of rails—I mean railway rails—each one sticking up about five feet above the ground. They're planted there like posts, and they're calculated to cause a great deal of difficulty for tanks. This hedge of railway rails parallels the barbed wires as far as you can see.

Out in front of the rails all appears to be peaceful and quiet, but it's reasonable to suppose that there are mines out there. This whole country is interlaced with high-speed, hard-surfaced military roads. Walking through the woods you may at any time come unexpectedly upon a field of ten acres of barbed wire. If you turned and looked behind you, you'd see a few grey buildings in the dim distance: those would be barracks. There are probably other underground barracks that you can't see. There would be peaceful-looking farm-houses in the valley—probably black and white cows in the fields.

Driving up here yesterday a man pointed, out to me a delightful little château set in a clump of woods. He remarked "My grandfather was killed there in 1870". That, you will remember, was in the Franco-Prussian war. No one knows how many Germans and how many Frenchmen have given up their lives in this peaceful-looking valley in the course of the last two hundred years. It has been the floodgate of war. This area has been fortified since Roman times—they found the remains of Roman forts while excavating for these modern monsters.

If you could look across these hills to the German frontier as I did just before coming down here you'd probably think of those thousands of miles of unguarded frontier between the United States and its neighbours and you'd probably wonder how many people in Germany and how many people in France would be happier if *this* frontier could be as peaceful as ours.

Above ground one sees very few troops about. Down here, all stations are manned and it's the same all along the line. The troops, or "moles" as they call themselves, seem well fed and happy. They play cards and listen to the radio during their leisure time, sleep in comfortable double-decker beds very much like those used in the American army barracks. (Every young man to-day, in France, must serve two years with the colours.) Those here seem to be cheerful enough about it. There is a spirit of comradeship between officers and men that is traditionally associated with the French Army, and discipline doesn't seem to suffer as a result of it. In a time of emergency, the lives of these men down here would depend on the smooth functioning of very complicated machinery. There must be a constant flow of power for the lights, the ventilators, the guns, the kitchen, and all other essential services. That power is supplied by a battery of huge Diesel engines. I couldn't find my way down to the engine-room: there are too many galleries and turnings on the way, but we have run a telephone line down there, so let's listen to them. (*Sound of the engines for ten seconds.*)

VAN ACKERS: Engine-room calling. There are eight big Diesel engines down here and they're running very quietly, although it may not sound so to you. Everything in the engine-room is spotlessly clean. These engines are coupled on alternators which produce the electric current for the fort. Along the wall are cylinders of compressed air for use in starting the engines. The door to the engine-room, like all the other doors, has rubber round the edges to make it gas-proof. I don't know how they get the fuel down here, but it must be stored underground in great quantities, since the fort is a self-contained unit capable of functioning for several weeks, even though it should be completely cut off from the outside world. This room is certainly the heart of the fort, but the whole mechanism is, of course, controlled through the telephone exchange.

E. MURROW: We're back at the master-switchboard still a little more than 100 feet underground in the Maginot Line. We've tried to tell you what we've seen in this most modern example of the oldest type of defence. It's the sort of thing that's difficult to put into words. There's something unreal about it. These long miles of white corridors. The unknown thousands of men spending their days and nights underground, being quite natural and matter-of-fact about it. It's spring up above, the sun is just going down, people only a few miles from here are sitting down to their evening meal, probably a band is playing in one of those delightful squares in Metz, soldiers on leave, dressed in sky-blue uniforms, are strolling through the parks with good-looking French girls.

In a few minutes, we're going up above, but the men down here will continue to man their stations—waiting. We had hoped to bring you the voice of one of the officers, commanding this section of the Maginot Line. They've shown us great courtesy and permitted us to try to tell you of things seen by very few people outside the French fortress army. However, they've made it quite clear that they consider it the job of the French army to plan and wait, and not to talk.

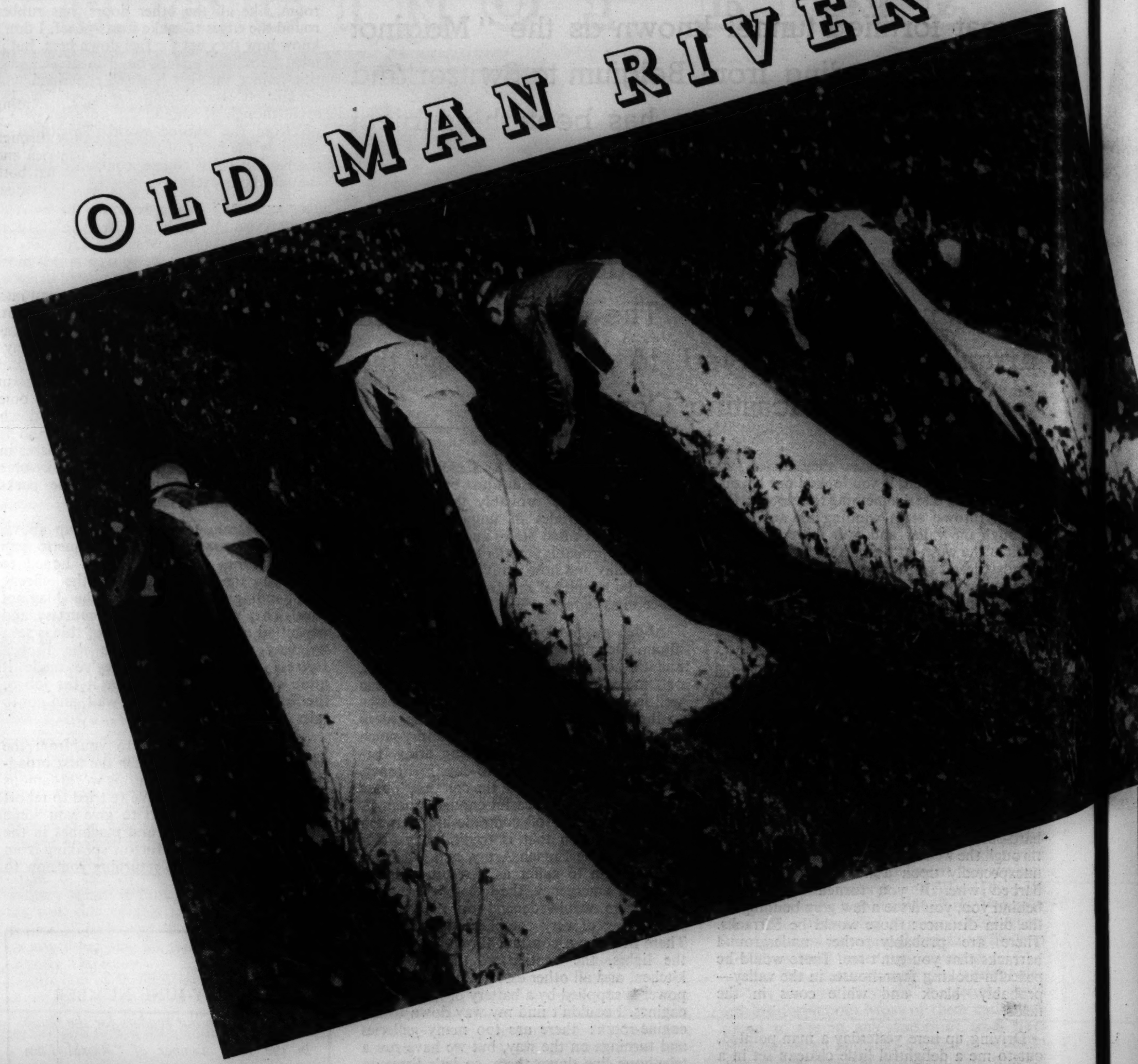
We have been talking to you from the Maginot Line. This has been the first broadcast ever undertaken from this world-famous system of fortifications. We've tried to report what we have seen, and to give you some impression of the men and machines in the Line. This is Edward Murrow speaking from the Maginot Line, and returning you now to America.

THE MAY-JUNE NUMBER

Apologies to our readers for the delay in the May number of "World Film News", and for the unexplained dating of that number May-June.

This was due to a technical breakdown. Subscribers will be credited with an extra issue.

OLD MAN RIVER



Two years ago in America Pare Lorentz made the first American documentary film, *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. He had drawn certain inspiration from British documentary work, but the product was very American. It inherited many of the defects of documentary—the sound track was over-obtrusive, the picture was occasionally hysterically impressionistic.

Now Pare Lorentz has produced his second film, *The River*. Made for the Farm Security Administration of the Roosevelt Government, it is mature and immeasurably superior to the first effort.

It describes the anarchic exploitation of the natural resources on the banks of the Mississippi and its tributaries. It shows unplanned individual exploitation, robbing a third of the Continent of its natural wealth and bringing poverty and desolation to all the country. It concludes by showing what the Roosevelt Administration is doing to bring back prosperity to the Mississippi region.

The film is four reels in length and brings this great subject to the screen with a logical building of sequences that is a neat piece of bricklaying. In consideration of its material and its technical polish, it is better than most documentaries produced in this country. The sound track is majestically conceived and sweeps the film along. The director's organisation of all the elements in the story, the brilliance of the photography make the whole film

★ ★ ★

Sensational American Documentary 'The River' reviewed

★ ★

a well-ordered natural sequence of events that never suffers from the defect of developing side issues.

It has been said that a great deal of money was spent on the film and it is that which produced its polish, but one only criticises a result, and there have been comparable British documentary films that have not approached the smoothness of *The River*.

Perhaps its most important quality, when all discussion of technical and informational virtues is finished, is its box office. One exhibitor who saw the film, and who has often expressed the opinion that British documentary is too difficult for ordinary cinemas, said that he would willingly show *The River*.

That, in the long run, is the test that all documentary films must pass. Will the ordinary cinema exhibitor book it? *The River* is eminently bookable.

Its defects come from two things; firstly from its impressionistic style, and secondly from the fact that it is reporting a State enterprise. Although its impressionism is brilliantly carried out, the film's pyrotechnics tend to obscure the information that it is presenting. Because it is reporting a State enterprise that ignores the individual, the film is cold. It overlooks the individual men who man the dykes, the men who load the cotton and the men who crop the cotton fields.

In the film men are only cogs in the wheel of a piece of State machinery. Even in showing the operations of individual enterprise only the mass effect is considered. Were there more personal feeling for human beings in the film, the problem and its solution might have communicated itself more deeply to the audience. It has the fault of all impressionistic technique—the shallow thinking, the lack of intimacy and the delight in film craft.

However, on the whole, it is a film to stir the imagination. It brings a new facet of the American scene to British audiences and, in so doing, it helps to play a part in that much to be desired end—a common understanding between the two great democracies of America and Britain. It seems that it is only through the medium of such films from America and through British documentary films that both nations obtain a realisation of their individual problems and their common interests.

David Thompson.

Pare Lorentz's documentary 'The River' (*Farm Security Administration*).

THE Administration seems to be very successful with the movies it makes. *The River* is its latest contribution to the art of the cinema, a picture which perhaps exceeds in beauty and force that earlier effort, beautiful and forceful too, which was known to us as *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. For both films the government has employed practically the same talent, and has shown itself in so doing as discreet and discriminating as some of the electorate feel it is in everything it handles. Pare Lorentz directed both, and wrote the text for them; Virgil Thomson composed the score in each case, and in both Thomas Chalmers, once of the Metropolitan, recited the Lorentz narrative.

You can see that there is nothing amateurish or casual about the Administration's interest in the movies. The result testifies to all this care and ability. One's only complaint can be that the picture is too brief, a phenomenal objection in this bustling world, and that the half-hour it runs seems to pass in a jiffy. So swift is the pace and so comprehensive the material that one may feel the effect of the film to be almost brusque.

The river of *The River* is the Mississippi, with its tributaries, its creeks and brooks, which spread out across two-thirds of the continent. The Lorentz objective, and the Administration's, has been to instruct us in the story of this river and its valley, the story of the soil impoverished first by cotton-growers and then by the Civil War, of the floods and famine that have ensued, and of the efforts for recovery now being made. It's a tremendous summary, which takes us from the spruce and pine of the Alleghenies to the mud of the delta; it reports upon the share-croppers in the Deep South, the ruins of the houses of Natchez, the floods of Louisville and Cincinnati, and the new dams in Tennessee.

To have covered so much mileage, to have demonstrated how a century's activities have worked upon the land, to have made so much material lucid in a half-hour, has required a laboratory exactitude which has been entirely successful. The argument is economic, but it happens to be of pictorial magnificence, which these cameramen have appreciated to the full, just as Mr. Lorentz doubtless realised that a simple listing of the names of rivers, ranges, and towns gave his text a swing and gusto almost poetic.

John Mosher, The New Yorker

LONDON GALLERY

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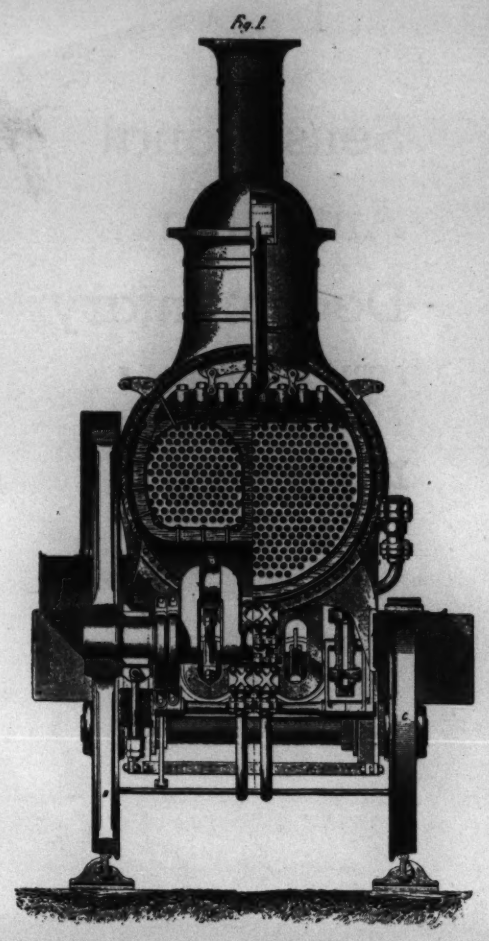
DURING the month of July the London Gallery will present "THE IMPACT OF MACHINES", a special exhibition consisting partly of original 19th century Drawings, Engravings and Lithographs of *Machines* (particularly those connected with transport) and partly of Modern Paintings in which motifs from machinery appear. This exhibition, which should interest students of Engineering history as well as followers of Modern Painting, will open on Tuesday, July 5th. Entrance 1/3. A double number of the LONDON BULLETIN will be devoted to the exhibition and will contain special articles and reproductions.



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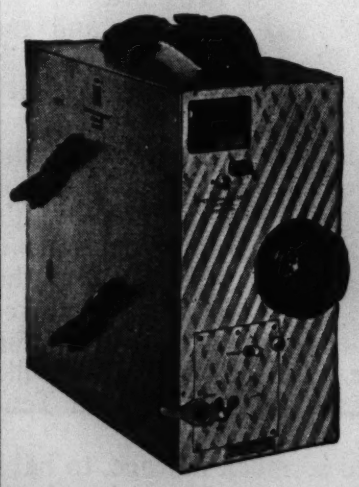

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Tibet, 14,300 ft.
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You have had many letters in praise of your wonderful apparatus, and no one knows better than yourselves the amazing workmanship that is put into all your equipment, but at the risk of being one more of a large crowd, I should like to take the opportunity of telling you how marvellously my Auto camera has stood up to a very trying variety of climates. Since leaving London on January 15th, I have travelled through British India, Siam, Malay, Java, Sumatra and on to Celebes, the large island between Borneo and New Guinea. In the latter place the temperature was 100° and the humidity about 94 one of the most trying climates imaginable.

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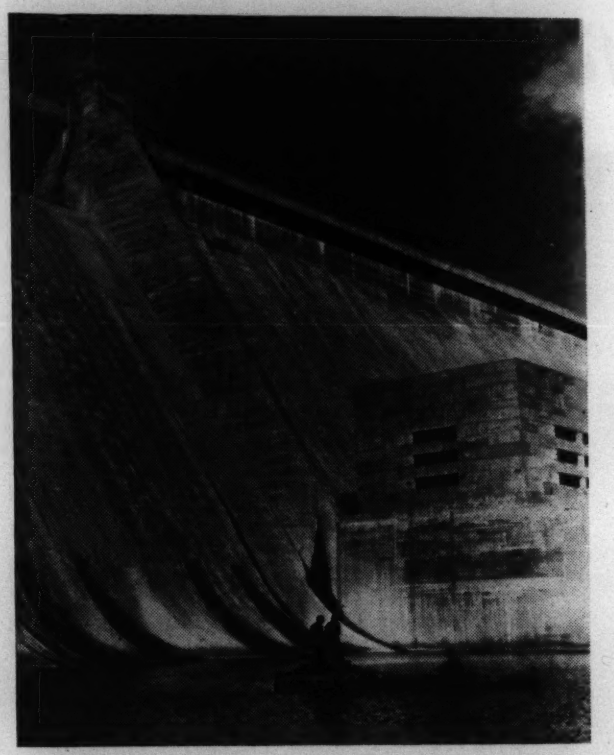
'The RIVER' DAMNED

Some critics have questioned the enthusiastic praise given Pare Lorentz's Film 'The River', in this country and America. W.F.N. prints this comment by Muriel Rukeyser without in any way endorsing her criticisms of the film.

SECOND in the projected series of U.S. Documentary Films, *The River* has followed *The Plow That Broke The Plains* under the backing of the U.S. Farm Security Administration. Infinitely more popular from the beginning than *The Plow*, *The River* is creating a stir that is bound to increase the attention given to documentaries in America, and open a field well-prepared by English imports and the few efforts already made in America. But *The River*, which is being met with inordinate praise, both from audiences and reviewers, has its dangers. They lie in a certain slackening of standard and tightness. The film itself is finished; the dangers are such that they may be passed on to future films. Looseness of conception, inadequacy of "plotting," lack of climax are all found in a work as ambitious in theme and range as any documentary has been, and with many of the virtues of breadth and common appeal.

The River was shot in 1936; just as the original script was finished, the Mississippi burst, and additions, shot in the flood areas, are in the film as it stands now. A patch inserted to make a film topical would show to the damage of most scripts, but it is among the vices and virtues of *The River* that there are no signs of stitches. The patch becomes one of a series, with very little garment visible. The film is loosely centred around the quality and effect of the Mississippi on its huge valley (which covers two-thirds of the United States), and the history of the valley in terms of its rivers which feed the Mississippi. There are sequences of beautiful shots, resolved without any satisfaction, stacking isolated excellences. For example, the small trickle, which signifies the headwaters, en-



larged into flood during the film, including fine moments of icicles dripping, clear shallow streams over pebbles, and the high motion of flood crest—and all this excellence never resolves into a river flow in one direction across a screen until it reaches its delta. The old river traffic, predicted so superbly by the shots of paddle-boats, never are carried out of Mark Twain's times; the old lumber industry falls away, but the new machine industries are never explained.

Its photography is the best thing about *The River*. Stacy Woodard, Floyd Crosby, and Willard Van Dyke have done some first-rate work; work so good that a spectator questions the sense of buying stock shots from such Hollywood films as *Come and Get It*, instead of spending the amount necessary to use dialogue for the few family scenes, instead of using commentary. The narration itself is weak, fake poetic, and often ridiculous. It depends often on names, place-names, battle-names, names of years and trees,

> Black spruce and Norway pine;
> Douglas fir and red cedar;
> Scarlet oak and shagbark hickory . . .

or, in the beginning, and in countless repetitions,

> . . . Down the Judith, the Grand, the Osage, and the Platte;
> The Rock, the Salt, the Black and Minnesota;
> Down the Monongahela, the Allegheny, Kanawha and Muskingum;
> The Miami, the Wabash, the Licking and the Green;
> The White, the Wolf, the Cache and the Black;
> Down the Kaw and Kaskaskia, the Red and Yazoo
> Down the Cumberland, Kentucky and the Tennessee . . .

names that are in themselves evocative and rich, but which in reiteration become the chanted jargon of a lesson, a childish and geographical glossolalia. The voice of the narrator (Thomas Chalmers) goes on and on in a well-trained baritone, smoothing over the lurches. But the film itself slips, and the slip is apparent from anywhere in the house. The voice is not talking about what is on the screen; climaxes slip; the music (Virgil Thomson) slips, and from variations on 'Hot Time In The Old Town To-night,' it slides to strident, outdated 1,2,1,2,3, blast-furnace music when we should be hearing the machines themselves; and, when the river as enemy has built to the top of its menace, we hear, ingratiatingly, in a new key, 'Old Man River.'

The River's story is that of a wide and magnificent basin wasted through war and boomtime, expansion, greed, and flood. The Mississippi has drawn off the land of the South, as far back as the mountains, through erosion, mismanagement and the great floods, washed the land off into the Gulf of Mexico. The story to be told is the land in terms of its people and industry and common history, and there is a future beyond that of re-planting. But in *The River*, the story is garbled, the people are all but omitted, and the land is left, with its sole promise in water-power (the shots of power-plants and dams are, again, first-rate) and between the lines an implicit condemnation for the entire farming South.

There is real excitement of content and possibility in *The River*. Its threat to documentaries is in its inherent carelessness, its sloppy technique and development. What it is doing is to lower its own standard through truncated sequences, missed connections, and a narration full of childish parallelisms. Its virtue is in the great stimulus of its material, its honest excitement, and the promise of future documentaries for which it is helping to prepare an audience.

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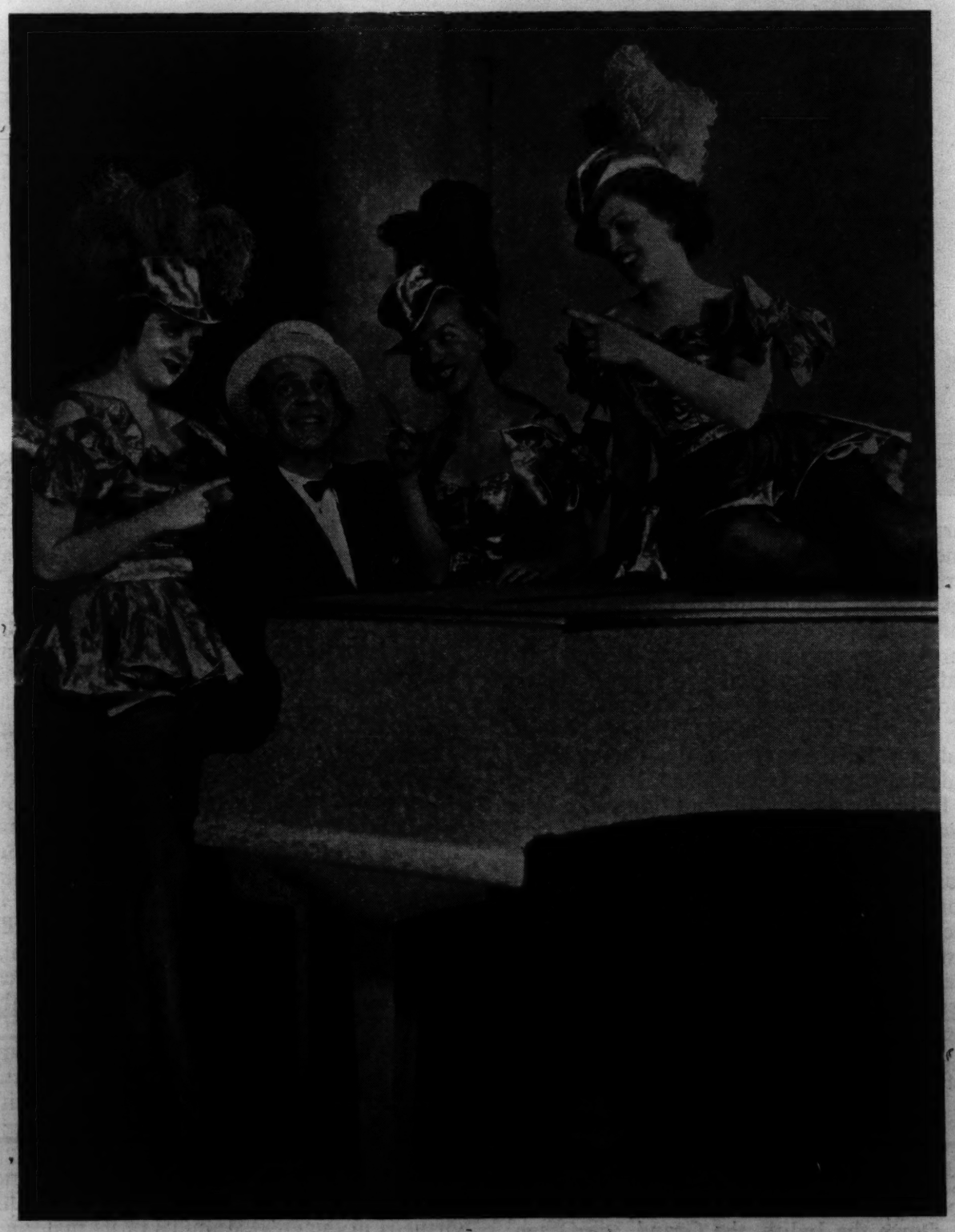
YOU CAN'T take it WITH YOU

Several people have tried. Alistair Cooke explains why they failed.



A scene from the American play ' Idiot's Delight ' now running in London.
[George Elliot and Anthony Vivian].

Now what is the situation about the production of American plays in London and the production of British plays in New York? I think first that on the score of revivals of classical plays we are about equal. New York sees Ibsen and Shakespeare and Tchekov as often as London. It is in the performance of dramatists of our own day that a list to starboard sets in. The average American playgoer in this city knows English drama of to-day by the plays of these people: Shaw, Lonsdale, O'Casey, Coward, Somerset Maugham, Dodie Smith, Keith Winter, W. H. Auden, Paul Vincent Carroll, J. B. Priestley, Ian Hay. He sees the London theatre and knows the plays of the people who write for it, less well, of course, than you do, but he sees a remarkable number of British plays and players and they are representative. . . . London is nothing like as familiar as it might be with the plays of S. N. Behrman, Paul Green, Irwin Shaw, John Steinbeck, Marc Connolly, M. Erskine, John Howard Lawson, Sidney Howard. So much for the plays, though I don't think that London should feel any duty to reflect in miniature the corresponding Broadway season. But what does matter is that any nation's plays should be accurately and naturally acted when they are staged abroad. Mr. George Jean Nathan, the American critic, once said that if it was American plays you were looking for in London you could expect to find at least one play in which "some hero of American history, like Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, or John Brown, will in the British handling be quite indistinguishable from Sir Thomas Beecham or Mr. Cyril Maude".

* * * *

I wish I could cap Mr. Nathan's remark by saying that in English plays in New York you will find a country vicar or an earl played in the manner of a friendly cowboy or a real estate agent, but I am afraid it is not true. An Englishman has reason to be proud of the Broadway productions of English plays.

Most of the casts of imported plays are imported too and directed by Englishmen; only once this year, in an adaptation of *Barchester Towers*, could it be truthfully said that Miss Ina Claire had treated Anthony Trollope to a night at the Stork Club, or some other fashionable New York night club, whereas only once in my memory was an American play in London performed in the way it would be put on in New York. That was the production of *Street Scene* in—was it 1930? But supposing that the drama of Great Britain and the drama of the United States were equally well presented on each side of the Atlantic, there would be other snags which producers are hitting all the time and which they say nothing can be done about. I mean snags that anybody would hit who started to choose the other country's entertainment. . . .

I KNOW no good reason why English people should be thought stupid because they don't like the Marx Brothers or the works of George Kaufman. The name of G. Kaufman is especially apt, because there is no possible doubt this side of the Atlantic

about his standing as a comic writer. He has a type of humour which seems to be indigenous to this country, but it is liked and understood almost as well by visiting French and Germans.

When *You Can't Take It With You* was produced in London the theatre was warmed by hardly a single smile. What sense or satire is there, the London critics asked, and justly, in a piece which shows a little business-man coming home by accident with a grand duchess? Well, that would be highly fantastic in London. It is not, however, so fantastic in a city like New York where 500 impoverished Russian dukes and countesses live, where, indeed they have banded themselves together into an association called "Russian Nobility, Inc.", which puts on once a year a great ball, costumed in the court dress of Nicolas II. *You Can't Take It With You* is one kind of play that nobody should have dreamed of exporting. If some theatre manager—if *that* unhappy theatre manager, should be listening he may fairly ask just what kind of play was it? Well, I would say it's a play built around local whimsicality. I know scores of people who have aunts and uncles exactly like that family and when Americans see it they warm to recognisable types and humours. But although you can safely translate mathematics, ideas and dollars into pounds, though you can even sometimes translate a national humour, one thing will not travel—it is your own local or family kind of whimsy. Private humour should be enjoyed in private, and so far as *You Can't Take It With You* is concerned, privacy means New York City.

Let's look at another play which is packing houses here but ran only a short time in London. I mean the farce *Room Service*. Again the London critics complained that here was a fantasia which could hardly be tied up with ordinary living. To its English audience it seemed like a puzzle ingeniously put together but not adding up to anything real or very funny. Yet *Room Service* depended for its fun on your being familiar with the way an American Hotel is operated. The very title is a native coining. I have many times had to rescue Englishmen who had little time to catch the boat and picked up the telephone in their bedroom, and expected that by talking to the same person they would get their bill, their luggage collected, their meals paid for and possibly their laundry returned and did not know that these services were decentralised. In New York *Room Service* is almost the funniest play I expect to see.

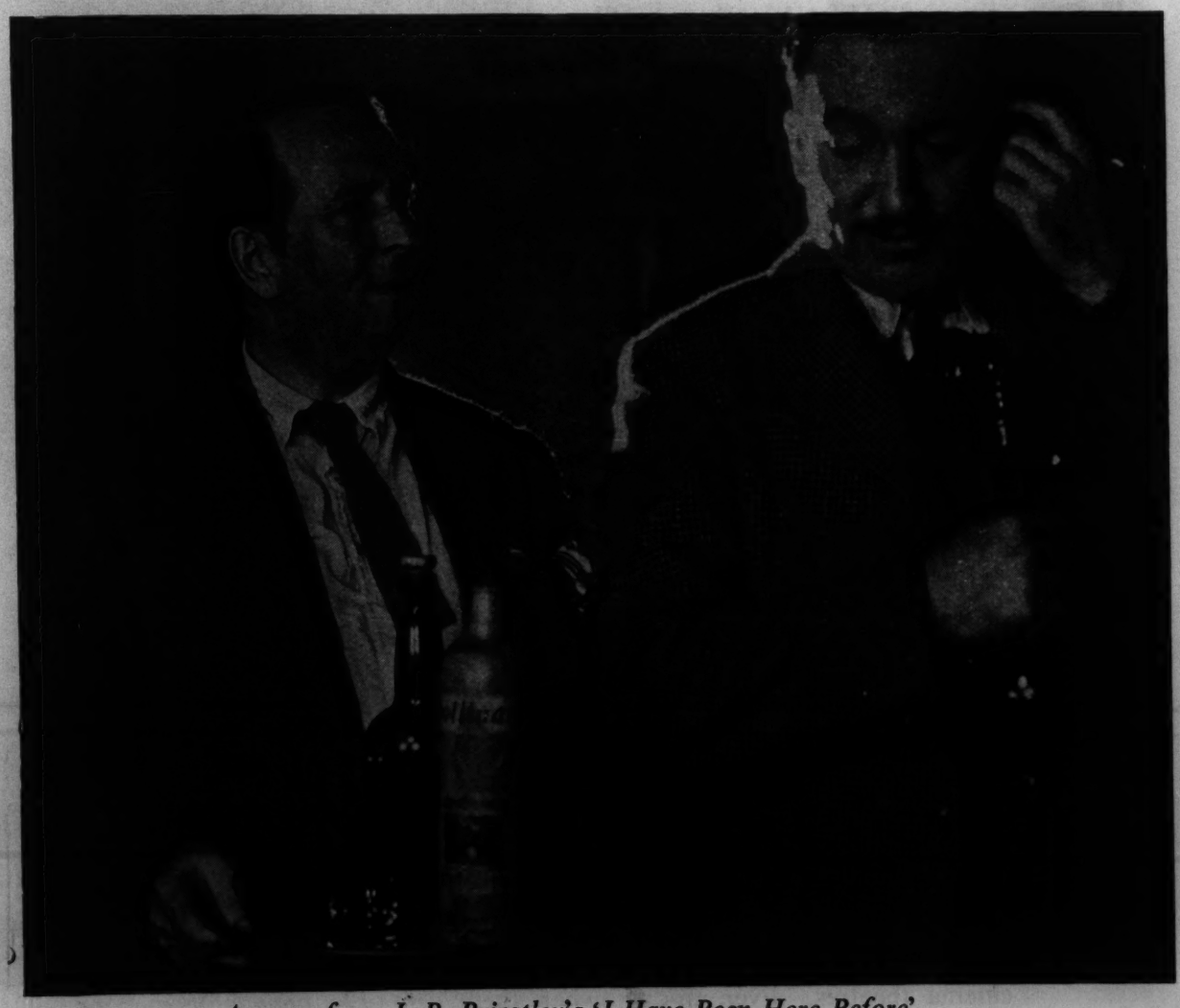
I say "almost" because there will be another one along next season. There always is. Its humour lay in the pathetic demands put on a hotel system which claims to attend to most human demands. After all, in a hotel where you can have drinks, or ice water, or a sandwich sent up to your room at any time of night and day, it is funny to take it for granted that you can call the manager and ask him to take care of a suicide for twenty minutes. Here were two men stuck in a hotel room they couldn't afford. They couldn't sneak out, because there would be the manager waiting with the bill. They have exhausted the hotel's patience and credit. Even the room service, the food has been cut off. They sit there wondering how to keep alive and as the night creeps along, one of them, a little white, says "I see spots before my eyes; spots as big as Hamburgers". Over by the bed, his friend says bitterly, "If you see one with onions, save it for me". These touched off the audience to laughter, but also to pity because the two men were two recognisable Americans who might at that moment be stuck in a hotel downtown Broadway. I understand the London production slowed down the lines and exaggerated the business so that the actors remained actors instead of turning into people. So what you were likely to see was a play of fantastic ideas; what we saw was a play of pathetic and uproarious facts.

Similarly, the imagination somehow stumbles at the idea of Miss Gladys Cooper playing Mrs. Sam Dodsworth, because Sinclair Lewis did not dream of anybody remotely like Gladys Cooper, any more, I suppose, than Shakespeare was thinking of Mae West when he wrote Lady Macbeth.

Several other charges have been made by one side against the other, but they are in effect boomerangs. They sting the people who throw them. Let me illustrate. You have heard about 100 per cent Americans—an unpopular race in England—but it may interest you to know that in some of the imported English plays the American critics recognise 100 per cent Englishmen. Mr. Robert Benchley, reviewing an English play he liked, said it was fine once you got used to the intense glandular activity of the young people in the first act, once they had stopped bouncing. Another charge is that of sentimentality, of a recognisable national brand. We are agreed, I hope, that the Americans have a very special and pretty nauseous way of being sentimental, over friendship, over giving a helping hand, over many a thing you have seen in the movies and blushed at; but the Americans recognise also a special brand of English sentimentality. They never can take seriously our heart-searching plays about the troubles of people like *Young Woodley*. They find something typical of us in our three-act tragedies about what we would call "sensitive young men". Here is a sentence of an American critic after a visit to such a play in London "It seems you will always find in London several imitations of Tchekov in which the repressed young wife of the master of the house will, at the end of the second act, throw herself passionately into the arms of any male character who can play the piano, provided, provided only, he was gassed in the last war."

The situation to-day, as I see it, is this. It is a true statement that Americans like ice-cream with chocolate sauce; it is a true statement that the English like roast beef with horseradish sauce; what our theatrical producers have done and continue to do is this. They say "Come and sit down at our table; we pick the best foods of all nations. On the menu to-day is a fine dollop of ice-cream which, as you're English, sir, we shall serve to you with horseradish sauce." The American gets the roast beef and finds he really rather likes it, but in the cause of international goodwill and good manners, he takes it with chocolate sauce.

This is an extract from a radio talk relayed from America on May 25th, and is reproduced by kind permission of the B.B.C.



A scene from J. B. Priestley's 'I Have Been Here Before'

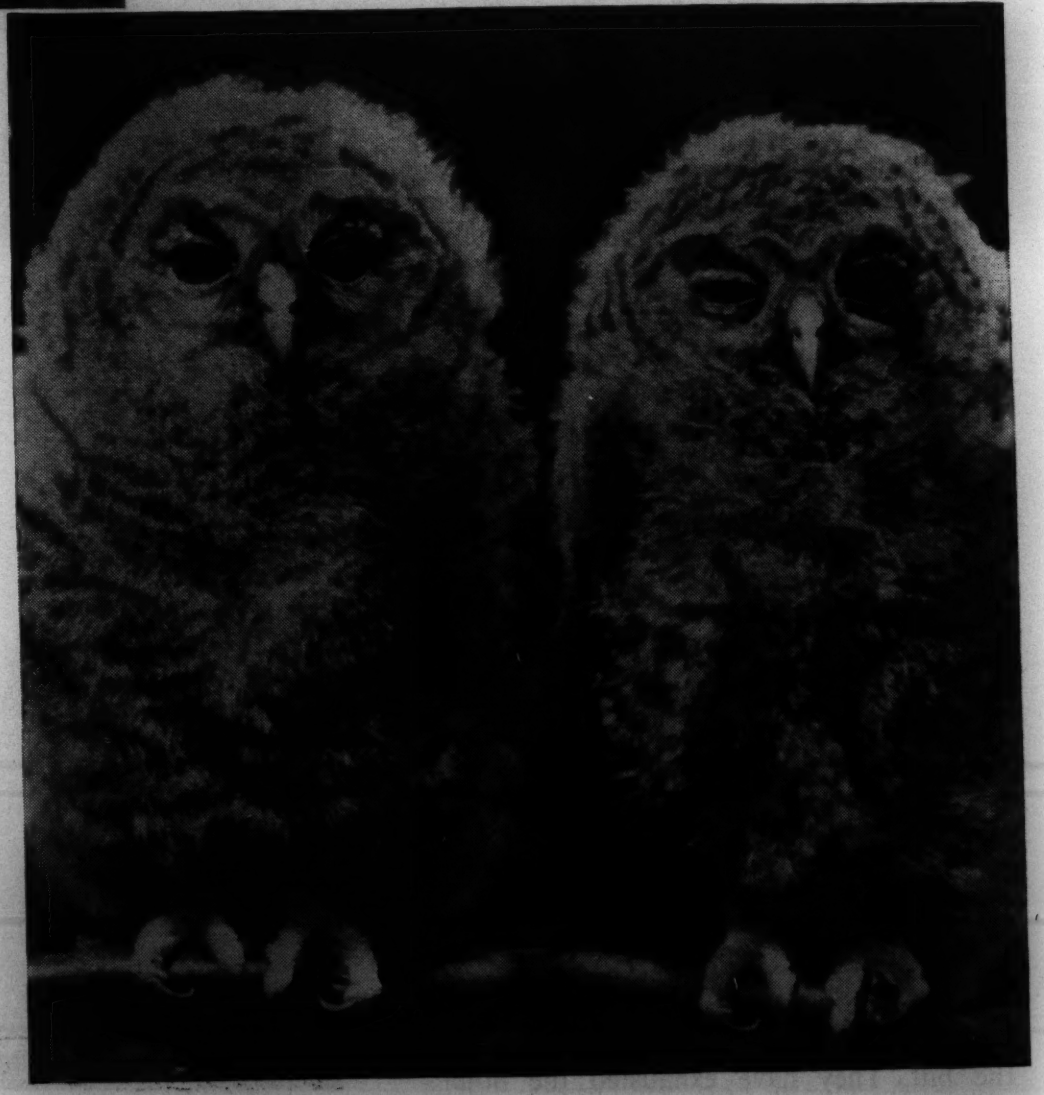
CAMERA on NATURE

Out of Gilbert White's History of Selborne came the now famous G.B.I. series, Secrets of Life. How they grew up, and how they are made, is the subject of this article.

TWENTY-TWO years ago a film executive happened on a copy of White's *History of Selborne*. That executive was H. Bruce Woolfe, and his turning over the pages was the origin of the series of films, *Secrets of Nature*, renamed four years ago *Secrets of Life*.

That these films should be based on Gilbert White's book is significant, because the spirit of "Selborne" remains very much the spirit of these short films. White knew a good deal, but he wanted to know more. His method was to watch, and note, and record, and finally to risk a deduction or raise a pertinent query. He was in no way didactic and, by nature, was averse to laying down the law. He wished to share with others the interest of the every-day world of nature that surrounded him, an interest which made his somewhat humdrum existence essentially exciting and colourful. In the same way the *Secrets*, though scientific in approach, are in themselves not at all instructional. They are not framed to teach, but only to give a record. To the record-ers their work is fascinating and they lay it before the public with the hope that those who see it may look at the world about them with added interest, may make notes and, perhaps, read and study further.

A printed book like "Selborne" can get to nature-lovers without difficulty, but twenty years ago there was only one way for a film to reach the public and that was through the cinema theatres. Even to-day, when there has been so great a development of non-



Top left: 'Kings In Exile.' *Above: 'Tawny Owl'*

theatrical film exhibition, it is still through the cinema theatres that one reaches the "common man" for whom the *Secrets* are made. In the last two and a half months over half a million people have seen the film *Kings in Exile* and, before its theatrical run is over, at least two million film-goers in this country alone will have been amused, interested and surprised by that simple zoo study. It was in order to reach such audiences that, twenty years ago, when the first *Secrets of Nature* film was produced, it was produced for theatrical exhibition and its successors have been made, with that same market in view, ever since.

Allowing for the fluctuations that one must expect in the entertainment world, this series of films has enjoyed an unbroken popularity. Sometimes, as now, the *Secrets* are extravagantly in favour, sometimes they attract less interest, but always there is some sort of demand for them. There are possibly two reasons for this. One is that the majority of British people are innately interested in nature, as the desire for window boxes, allotments, and little plots of garden proves. The second is that the makers of the films do their best to remember that they are making entertainment films to be shown in the middle of an entertainment programme, and make an effort, therefore, to produce something that can follow a Frank Lloyd production or a Will Hay comedy without giving the onlookers too great a shock by change of atmosphere. Like a turn in a variety programme the short film must be different from what goes before and after, but remain in the same key.

Indeed, if one studies this series of shorts from its inception, one gets very interesting evidence of the change in film entertainment during the last twenty years. The early *Secrets* were often long one-reelers, eleven or twelve hundred feet, and the pictures, straight scenes taken from one set-up, were interspersed with long continuity titles. Lucky producers of those early days, who, when their subject failed to oblige with the necessary action, could put in a title! Patient audiences that allowed their entertainment to move so slowly!

By 1926 the titles were much shorter and the films themselves never exceeded the limit of a thousand feet. At this date too, there begins to be variety of angle. By 1929, in the manner of the best silent films, the titles had, as far as possible, disappeared. There were many more effects gained by cutting and action, and a large variety of camera angles were employed. 1930 introduced sound, and the first sound short to be produced in Great Britain was a *Secrets of Nature*, the life of a Sweet-Pea, edited against time to be included in the première of Douglas Fairbanks's *Taming of the Shrew*.

The *Secrets*, which were short and relatively inexpensive, were used for many of the early sound experiments to be made in this country. They were the first films to try, and then to discard, musical masterpieces as accompaniments. They were the first short films to have their music composed for them. They include most of the early experiments in commentary, long syllabled words for slow moving scenes, and short staccato syllables for quick action. *Plants of the Underworld*, in the second 1930 Series, included the first attempt to fit specially written blank verse into the commentary. Another picture in the same Series, *Daily Dozen at the Zoo*, was the original attempt to cut actuality pictures to an already recorded sound-track, after the example set by Walt Disney with his Mickey Mouse cartoons. When you remember that the moviolas of 1930 were very rough and ready and frequently jumped two or three frames, this pioneer effort was far more of a labour than modern young editors would imagine. The frames had to be hand-counted as there was no mechanical way of measuring them, and the film was 960 feet long!

On the whole the *Secrets* have not had many changes of commentator and those changes are themselves indicative of the trend of the entertainment film. At first, when sound films were an exciting novelty and everything was more or less amateur, a studio executive with a particularly pleasing voice

recorded commentaries in odd moments. As sound became established, there dawned the era of the B.B.C. announcer. Then, when American quick-fire commentaries and the spate of gangster pictures accustomed audiences to more crisp speech, a B.B.C. actor was substituted and now a specialised film commentator is employed. Some people, noticeably correspondents to the *Times*, object to this sequence of commentary change as a decline of dignity, which it undoubtedly is; but surely only the young, the uncertain, and the *Times* are always dignified. The quips of the *Secrets of Life* commentaries grow out of the pictures themselves and the audience listens (which it often does not trouble to do with a serious commentary), laughs, and remembers.

Few people appreciate how real is the team work on *Secrets of Life*. Camera-man, editor, musical director and commentator, all collaborate closely to give that impression of unity which is essential to a short picture. Each worker alters and modifies his work to make it dovetail into that of the others. The most intransigent are undoubtedly the actual cinematographers who can, if they wish, announce that nature has defeated them, but it is a point of honour with them not to be defeated by nature. Witness Percy Smith who, when a film on the "Dodder" had been undertaken, found at Kew and in the British Museum thirty-two ways of killing this plant pest, but no suggestions of how to make the seeds germinate. It took him two years to find out. Most of the *Secrets* except Zoo subjects, take two years to make, partly because of such problems as that set by the Dodder, partly because the need for a variety of camera angles makes one season's work inadequate for the editor's demands. Four years for a really difficult microscopic subject is not an uncommon period of production.

For, entertainment as they are, the *Secrets* very often justify their name and do in truth reveal details of natural movement. Botanists look at the stop-motion work and say, "We knew this happened, but we have never seen it happen"; slow-motion, cinémicrography and tank work frequently provide fresh material for the biologist. Each series of *Secrets of Life* is made up of six subjects, and these usually include one film of bird life, one of insect life, one fresh water or marine subject, one study of plant life, one definitely microscopic subject and one zoological study. This pattern cannot always be adhered to because sometimes a film fails to materialise, but, as about nine or ten films are put into production to ensure half a dozen being ready to time, the variation from the plan is not considerable. These six types of subject ensure variety and ensure also a good deal of powder in the jam—the films are entertainment, but there is a wealth of instruction in them for those who want it.

Sometimes the *Secrets of Life* series are confused with biological films such as *Hydra*, or nature-study films of the *Plover* type. But films for instruction are produced on entirely different lines, with slower editing, simple and serious commentary and no additional sound except, when possible, natural sound. Occasionally the editing of the mute of a *Secret* will serve also for a simple nature study, as in the case of *Hedgerows*, but usually some scenes need to be added or omitted. In most cases, as in *Embryology of the Trout* and *Catch of the Season*, both dealing with trout, only a very small amount of biological material is common to both films and the presentation of it is entirely different. The educational film is for those who wish to learn, the *Secrets of Life* is designed for those who wish to relax. But the *Secrets* reach those whom the educational film can, at present, never touch. They widen the outlook of very ordinary people who take a char-a-banc ride to Scarborough, who hike out of Glasgow, who paddle at Margate or keep a bowl of gold-fish in a London flat. It is significant that the most popular of the series have been those dealing with subjects that everyone knows, a Scarlet Runner or a Thistle. And, if some of the public who fill the sixpenny seats, can, from an entertainment "short", catch a little of the spirit of Gilbert White of Selborne, the makers of *Secrets of Life* feel that their two to four years' work is well justified.

A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER

Reviewed by Basil Wright

To review *A Slight Case of Murder* in Runyonese—which the film most richly merits—would be too easy a way out of criticising one of the most interesting type-films ever to emerge from Hollywood. By no conceivable stretch of imagination could you imagine any other area of the world which could take a story of the most macabre nature and make it genuinely funny—using moreover a language, or rather argot, which, up till the coming of the talkie, would have been about as intelligible as Hindustani to the average British audience, and which, even now, must need sharp hearing and an alert brain in anyone not yet a confirmed reader of the amazing Damon (he has by the way found a real Pythias in the gentleman who adapted the story for the screen).

Here is the story. Prohibition having been repealed (as Julius Cæsar would put it), Marko, a wealthy purveyor of bootleg beer (a gentleman gangster in fact) decides to go legitimate. Unfortunately his beer is foul, and was only consumed *faute-de-mieux* in the old days, and he is hard pressed by the bank. He departs for his country house in Saratoga, pausing en route to pick up the toughest boy ever from his Alma Mater (an orphanage), and there finds (*a*) four corpses, (*b*) the proceeds of a hold-up of the Bookies' funds (half a million), (*c*) a State Trooper preparing to marry his only daughter, and (*d*)—if he but knew it—the murderer himself, slipping in and out of bedroom doors. He dumps the corpses on various doorsteps of local folk he dislikes, but his henchmen discover that there is 10,000 dollars reward for each corpse (dead or alive). They rush out to collect them again, and conceal them in a closet upstairs. To cut a long story short, the complications are finally resolved by the State Trooper, who, with eyes firmly shut and shaking with terror, re-shoots the corpses through the closed door, and with a wild final bang kills the murderer —quite by mistake—after which he most appropriately falls in a dead faint.

If you think this plot distasteful, I recommend you to go and see the film, in order to get some idea of what this sort of film-making means. It means that the entire film is genuinely funny; it means that the story, as complicated as one could possibly imagine, is so neatly constructed and so clearly presented that it has all the brilliance of cut glass; it means, too, the employment, presumably at any cost, of an ace director (Lloyd Bacon) and an all-star cast, including Edward G. Robinson (of whom more anon), Ruth Donnelly, that masterly matron with a heart (and hair) of gold, Allen Jenkins, exquisitely dumb, and Bobby Jordan, one of those incredible kids from *Dead End;* to all which we must most certainly add a host of small part players, who, glimpsed even for a short flash though many of them be, all represent a polished capability which should be (but isn't) the despair of our own studios.

It is no mean feat to operate about six sub-plots continuously without the slightest loss of ease or intelligibility, but so confident is Lloyd Bacon that he even throws in a number of elaborate gags for good measure, of which one is the most comic I have ever seen. It involves, of course, death. Marko, throwing a party, with a really bad singer as the entertainer, bethinks him in his warm-hearted way of a friend, who is in hospital at San Diego. He gets through to him on long distance, and transmits "I'm Dancing with Tears in my Eyes" to the invalid, who is surrounded by nurses and surmounted by an ice-pack. As the song ends, so the invalid passes away. Why this should be so funny only the silver screen can explain.

Much of the balance of *A Slight Case of Murder* depends on the personality of Marko, and here Edward G. Robinson blossoms into a new splendour. It is a far cry from the ranting melodramatics of *Two Seconds* to this gauche, blustering, likeable tough; just a great big little boy with a slug-and-racket background, a precarious present, and a pretty murky future. Essentially superficial the characterisation may be, but Robinson invests it with conviction and adorns it with all the trimmings of a considered acting technique. Observe carefully his speech to the orphans. The dialogue is at its weakest, but little Cæsar, by means of I couldn't count how many neat little tricks, makes it sincere, amusing and pathetic. It is typical that immediately afterwards he refuses the star pupils from whom he is to select one for a holiday at his estate, and asks for the worst boy in the school. ("Pierre," says the headmistress, "Take three of the other older boys with you, go down to the cellar, unlock Douglas and bring him to my study.") It is also typical that among all the hurly-burlies of corpse gathering he never forgets the needs of this minor thug, whom he regards as possessing something very near a halo.

There are no major, and few minor criticisms to make of this film. I found it grand entertainment, slightly satirical, very funny, and not at all immoral. The Runyon dialogue is glorious, though whether this is a case of art imitating nature, or vice versa, it is difficult to say.

CURIOUSLY enough, the story of *Break the News* also makes excursions into the macabre. The core of the plot is a fake murder, for publicity purposes, arranged by two chorus boys. Unfortunately the murderee, while awaiting the dramatic moment to save his friend from the death sentence, is kidnapped and condemned to death by some Ruritanian revolutionaries, with the result that we are treated to a pretty grim sequence of Maurice Chevalier jittering in the condemned cell; and the episode is sufficiently unfunny to take the film out of comedy into the hinterlands of melodrama.

I doubt if I would have recognised *Break the News* as a René Clair film had I not been so informed by the advance publicity and the credit titles. Much of it is efficient comedy; much of it, too, is slow and uninspired; while the two or three good sequences are but shadow-boxing from the maestro who made *Les Deux Timides* and *Le Million.* The fantasy of Jack Buchanan, changing hats rapidly according to which party is uppermost in a street revolution, is good, but not good enough. The nearest approach to the old Clair standards is reached in the scenes of a really bad musical comedy in progress, with Chevalier and Buchanan as appallingly inefficient extras and embarrassingly frightful hoofers. But in general the film straggles along, and seems, like Macduff, to have been "from its mother's womb untimely ripped". However, the spark still glows, and one may still expect Clair to return to form when he feels a little more at home in the peculiar atmosphere of London.

To hear Clark Gable, as a death-tempting pilot, refer to the sky—in front of his wife—as his mistress, and to talk of slapping its pretty little face, is a new and not particularly enjoyable experience. *Test Pilot* is full of boloney of this sort, with full screen close-ups of Gable and Myrna Loy registering away in the manner of the good old days of the silent film. Devoted though I am to Miss Loy, I felt I had never seen her so unhappily cast; as for Mr. Gable, he is—at any rate—as efficient at his job as ever, but—"some people like spinach and others do not" as Mr. Theo Fligelstone so sagely remarked a few years back. The best things about *Test Pilot* are firstly Spencer Tracy, who gives a magnificent performance as the pilot's inarticulate mechanic, and is at times so real as to tear the picture to tatters (but must he *always* die towards the end of Reel Six?); and secondly, the aerial stuff, which is really well done. The menacing truck-and-pan shot of the big bomber, gleaming and solitary on the flying field, which signals the climax of the film, says a great deal more in one shot than all the high-falutin' dialogue, the suffering faces, and the noise. There is, however, no dog in the film.

Walter Wanger's

BLOCKADE

Reviewed by Marion Fraser

IT is a pity that *Blockade* is a war picture. It is a very great pity that it is a picture of a war that is happening so very near to us. The picture may be a success in America. America is very far away from Spain. But it will not be a success in Britain. Word will get around. It is an unpleasant picture to see. Children are shown crying, starving and hoping without reason. Women are shown despairing, dying. The fact of war is shown naked. That fact is food or lack of it, destruction, suffering, betrayal. And at the crux of it is the human heart and mind that is capable at the same time of sympathy and callousness; capable of sacrificing the lives and untold sufferings of others for the sake of one wretched life that happens to be one's own. The film will tell you that this precious life, this precious self is walking the pavements of London, and the pavements in all the towns of Britain. Its eyes are shut and because they are, children are starving, limbs are being torn asunder, families are being parted, human affections and human emotions are being petrified. This is the message of *Blockade:* "*Where is the conscience of the world?*"

Blockade is a film directed by William Dieterle and in it Madeleine Carroll and Henry Fonda play the principal parts. Despite all the trappings of studios: assistant directors, continuity girls, back projection, niggers, booms, blimps and all the rest: despite numerous crudities and clichés, a good deal of sincerity has crept into the film. And how it has happened is really a miracle. One has the sensation that a play is being acted and that the players are about to push the camera aside and take their bow for an indifferent but conscientious performance. At the end Henry Fonda faces the audience, schoolboyishly, crudely earnest and asks "Where is there peace?" The film is pointed to this question mark.

Boy and girl romance, parting, misunderstanding, reconciliation, reward—all are there, but there is no felicity and little happiness. There is no happy ending. The sweethearts know that there is no such thing and the film tries to say that there is no such thing for sweethearts anywhere—a truth that the screen has seldom revealed.

BLOCKADE is not the sort of picture we pay to see. It takes the flesh off the bones of our conventions; it strips off respectability and habit and tradition. It kills our dreams and if we are cowards it makes us afraid. It is very much too near the truth and too near home. It is not really important that the air warfare is taking place in Spain; it would not be really important that the bombs were falling in Kensington Gardens among the prams and nursemaids. The important thing is that the cause of these horrors is in our own minds that shift with every wind of propaganda, that make cowards or heroes of us at will, that shut out the main issues and concern themselves with the minor ones, that seek ease and comfort for the body at the expense of a thousand other bodies that are broken and gangrened.

No doubt you will refuse to see *Blockade* now that you have been told what it is all about. Indifference is the greatest panacea for what ails us. There is one hope—that we have used the drug so long it will refuse to work. However, an account of the film story may tempt you to see it. It follows all the rules of movie scenarios.

THE story begins in Spain with a stock situation. An expensive young woman in an expensive car has a road accident. A young peasant (with the help of picturesque, flute-playing sheep-herd) succours her. They fall in love. War breaks out. The peasant leads the neighbours in defending his land against the enemy, and is given a special commission to track down spies. The girl's father is a spy. The peasant shoots him and the two meet over his dead body. He arrests the girl and a convenient tête-à-tête is arranged by an air raid. The girl escapes to headquarters where she meets the villain (already known to her) and his superior officer, both of whom are working against the party to which they ostensibly belong. They enrol her as a spy and she is to arrange for the destruction of a food ship. This food ship is to save from starvation the entire population of a beleaguered town. She conveys the message to destroy the ship, but on seeing the frightful conditions in the town, repents and tries to cancel instructions. This is unsuccessful and a ship entering harbour is blown up. But the ship is a decoy, not the food-ship. The girl has cleared herself as far as the peasant is concerned but she has betrayed her chiefs. She and the peasant are about to be shot when at the psychological moment the villains are revealed, the sweethearts saved and, of course, the people are fed.

The astonishing truthful moments in the film come not from the story but from the material it has used from contemporary history. That this should happen in Hollywood is indeed a miracle.

REVIEW OF REVIEWS

Edited by H. E. BLYTH

W.F.N. Selection

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Blockade	*
Owd Bob	*

Other Films covered in this issue:

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Test Pilot

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The Challenge

We're Going to be Rich

The Girl of the Golden West

Sailing Along

Jezebel

J'Accuse

L'Équipage

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

(Norman Taurog—Selznick International.)
Tommy Kelly, Ann Gillis, Jackie Moran.

This should have been called *Children in Colour*. Such a cavalcade of infancy in bloom, complete down to the last freckle, has not been seen on the screen before. The weakness of David Selznick's very beautiful and painstaking adaptation of the Mark Twain classic is that it has been treated a little too reverentially. Situations are laboured, the humour creaks and the "love affairs" of the children are a trifle too precocious. Nothing rings true. Fortunately, there is a long and superb thrill when Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher are lost in a vast cave, stuffed with all the resources of Technicolor and echoing with eerie sound. This scene is one of the finest technical achievements in screen history.

Tommy Kelly is a most attractive little boy. Ann Gillis is his plump and promising partner. David Holt makes a good job of Tom's priggish half-brother, Sid. There should have been more of Jackie Moran as Huckleberry Finn. May Robson is admirable as Aunt Polly, especially in her repressed emotions, and the Mississippi is magnificent, though one sees too little of it. Final opinion is that this day and age have lost touch with Mark Twain, but that is neither his fault nor that of Norman Taurog, who directed the film.

—G. A. Atkinson, *The Sunday Referee*

The two children, Tommy Kelly and Ann Gillis, bear upon their slim shoulders the weight of the latest film of Mark Twain's story. They perform with a freshness that has nothing to do with the expert behaviour of the usual actors from stage nurseries, are funny and teary and frightened and heroic, and altogether very much the Mark Twain children. Norman Taurog officially directed them, but one guesses he must almost have been sensible enough to let them direct him and that he took their word for what they ought to do in this predicament and that. Especially does the film triumph in its scenes of poignance and of terror, in those of out-and-out panic, as in the final cave scenes, for instance ; and I don't think the followers of our country's master humorist will be surprised or chagrined to find *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* primarily not a funny picture. Brother Sid Sawyer gets a tomato or a shortcake smack in the face, which is familiar Sennett fare, but also, I suspect, good old-fashioned Missouri. Injun Joe, too, is allowed a bit of knife-throwing in the melo style, which is a bit beyond the borders of the general idea. But I suppose these bits are just put in to amuse youngsters in the audience. That the whole thing is washed in Technicolor didn't bother me except for a lurid sunset or two. Children can stand the dyes, I guess, or perhaps, as times goes on, I am becoming acclimated to Technicolor myself.

—John Mosher, *The New Yorker*

The Challenge

(Milton Rosmer—G.F.D.)
Luis Trenker, Robert Douglas.

The ascent of the Matterhorn by Edward Whymper and his party in 1864 was sufficiently dramatic in all its attendant circumstances, and when these have been touched up—the film explicitly claims the usual licence to be inaccurate in detail—there is certainly enough material for a plot. There is the rivalry with the Italian party, Whymper's extraordinary decision to climb the mountain from what seemed an impossible side, the appalling disaster after the peak had been won, and, finally, the suspicion that Whymper had cut the rope to free himself.

But everything is very properly subordinate to the actual climb, which is represented with startling realism and most skilfully prolonged suspense. The photography is magnificent, and a hundred ingenious devices are used to make the spectator feel himself at one with climbers, giddy when they contemplate the abysses below them, and helpless when they slip. The climb is, in fact, so extremely well done that the episode with which the film ends, when Whymper is almost lynched by angry villagers and in the nick of time proved innocent of cutting the rope, seems uncommonly tame, even though everything is done to make it dramatic, and even melodramatic.

—*The Times*

There are passages in this wonderfully contrived picture which have a shuddering actuality. The point of the story of Whymper's conquest of the Matterhorn, as it is told here, is a guide's heroism in undertaking a lone climb to bring back the ends of a rope and thus prove (though he meant otherwise) that it broke through fraying instead of being cut by the great mountaineer to save his own skin. Four men were killed through the breaking of the rope and the scene in which their bodies go hurtling through thousands of feet, bouncing upon rocks during the fall, is so terrifying that one needs the hasty reflection that, whatever happened in the disaster of seventy years ago, here they are dummies.

But the climbing sequences we see were performed on the mountain itself. There is no hint of deception or fake about them. One shivers responsively at the contemplation of these hazards. The actors concerned seem to be taking the chances that were taken by the characters in the story.

—A. T. Borthwick, *The News Chronicle*

Test Pilot

(Victor Fleming—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.)
Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Myrna Loy.

One of the most thrilling pictures I have ever seen, and one of the finest technical achievements of the screen, is Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *Test Pilot*. Clark Gable plays the pilot. I think it is the finest performance of his career. He is tough, yet moving in the intensity of his performance. With him is Spencer Tracy, as his mechanic, a big-hearted, rough, kindly, fatalistic fellow who can take everything as it comes till his pilot really falls in love with a girl who knows that she has entered a life that is a magnificent lunacy that must end in a mental breakdown or widowhood at any moment. The girl's brave realisation almost breaks him down till finally, when he is dying after an accident, he whispers, "This is a break for me. Now I shall never

have to go and tell her." Tracy gives one of those superbly fine performances that seem so easy to him. He seems to key up the tension of the whole picture by his quiet, restrained, yet emotionally effective acting. Myrna Loy is the girl. She, too, goes through all the emotions from gaiety to hysteria. It is also the best thing she has done. Lionel Barrymore, Samuel Hinds and several other well-known people are in the cast, but the trio of stars carry it, stepping into the tense, thrilling, ominous, splendidly courageous spirit of the film. *Test Pilot* sets an altitude record for the films: it will probably do the same thing for the takings at the box-office.

—Richard Haestier, *The Star*

The flying scenes in this picture are about the best since *Hell's Angels*. But what points the film gains on flying, it rather tends to lose on sentiment. Gable is the tough, drinking pilot of test machines . . . the man who has to take a brand new machine up and put it through tricks it will never be asked to do again. The batting average works out at around a crack-up every three trips. Gable gives one of the best performances of his career. He is tough, but moving and tense. That grand actor, Spencer Tracy, again turns in one of his deceptively easy-looking bits of acting. His quiet, unemotional playing serves to heighten the tension of Myrna Loy and Gable. Myrna shows that crazy comedy hasn't robbed her of the power of portraying grief and drama. It is unbelievable that the same firm could turn out *Test Pilot* and *Girl of the Golden West*. And, by the way, a lot of this picture is in close-up. Nearly every shot of Clark Gable and Myrna Loy is a full-face close-up. Which leads me into thought. Myrna Loy is now over thirty, Gable bordering forty. For ten years they've been at the top of the tree. And there's nobody to succeed them. The star building system of Hollywood doesn't seem to be working. Five years, they used to say. Then you're through. M.-G.-M. have proved how wrong that system is. In ten years they've made practically no attempt to build any new stars other than their present list of Gable, Garbo, Loy, Crawford and the rest.

—Jasper Long, *The Sunday Pictorial*

Owd Bob

(Robert Stevenson—Gainsborough.)
Will Fyffe, John Loder, Margaret Lockwood.

A Scottish folk-tale of a cantankerous old sheepherder and his dog, Black Wull. Both are treacherous, sly creatures, distrusted by the town folk and feared by neighbourhood sheep owners. McAdam, the sheepherder, is a drunkard; Black Wull is part wolf, so when sheep are found slaughtered on the fells every morning, the townsfolk band together and accuse the whiskey-befuddled McAdam of the crime. The penalty is that he must kill Black Wull. Throughout this legend is a refreshing and authentic atmosphere of an unfamiliar cinema people. The leisurely excitement of the sheepherding contests, the caustic humour of the rustic, hardy partying, the poignancy of McAdam's moment of retribution—all these are beautifully, serenely done. Both the photography and the acting have the same unpretentious sturdiness of the moors upon which they take place. *Folk-lore of infinite riches.* —*Stage*

I have just seen *Owd Bob* and like it so much that I find it difficult not to write extravagantly about it. I am anxious not to spoil it for you by overpraise, because the film itself is so very slight and simple. It is just a story of Cumberland shepherds and their dogs, the annual excitement of the sheep-dog trials, and the common threat to the dales of a dog that runs wild and becomes a killer. People who like their pictures smart and spectacular may find it tedious. I thought

"Has taken herself more seriously . . ."

it fascinating, and, as a born Northerner, I was grateful for the Eskdale scenes, and couldn't have enough of them. To see those dark, rain-piled skies again, after the hard brilliance of Californian sunshine, and the decorum of Elstree and Denham, was as good as a holiday to me.

—C. A. Lejeune, *The Sunday Observer*

The way in which the camera follows the movements of the sheep-dogs leaves an impression of great beauty and extreme intelligence. The sheep-dog Owd Bob, like his only serious competitor Black Wull, is seen momentarily on the skyline, and in every action of his body there is something akin to poetry. The film might well have gained considerably by an unhappy ending for the humans and a longer innings for the dogs. —*The Times*

We're Going to be Rich

(Monty Banks—20th Century-Fox.)
Gracie Fields, Victor McLaglen, Brian Donlevy.

The Elysian Fields has not yet been photographed. I mean that our Gracie, the cheerful Melba of the music-halls, has not been translated satisfactorily to the screen. Twentieth Century-Fox sent an exhibition to the English hinterland to find, photograph and flaunt her. The expedition cost something more than £200,000. It vowed to get away from the "mill girl makes good on stage" theme, done to death by British producers. It said, presumably, "This is our chance to make Gracie an international star. Let's go". They've gone, and I do not think that the resulting picture, *We're Going to be Rich*, shoves Miss Fields any nearer the Californian stars.

Miss Fields is subdued. She cracks only one music-hall joke after a song called "Walter, Walter" ("take me to the altar"). And I thought her best number was "There is a tavern in the town", a distinctively appropriate ditty in view of McLaglen's thirst. Apart from the singing, the really satisfactory events are the fights, the bare-knuckle affair between McLaglen and Don McCorkindale, and the tin-tray knock-down by Gracie, McLaglen being again the loser. Considering the money that it cost, *We're Going to be Rich* is a disappointment. What they call "production value" is there, but the story lies buried underneath it.

—Ian Coster, *The Evening Standard*

It has been said that Gracie Fields's most ardent admirers will not take kindly to *We're Going to be Rich*. If this is so, it is hard to see why. Here for once she has been given a good, if albeit a simple, story, as well as a capable supporting cast who can help to take the weight of the production off her shoulders, and a most satisfactory background. In consequence she has less to do, but in the past she has always had too much. Moreover, her comedy is kept in its place, and although she sings as wide a selection of her famous songs as anyone could desire, she yet makes us laugh only while she is singing them, and for the rest is concerned with a serious part which she plays with conviction and restraint. That she should be thus cast is surely no mistake. She is still "Our Gracie", no doubt, but of recent years she has taken herself more seriously, and her public have seemed willing that she should do so. For these reasons we are of the opinion that this is her best picture, and there are other reasons as well. Monty Banks's Johannesburg provides a fine period setting, and his crowd of extra players have risen nobly to the occasion. For those who like their entertainment straightforward and vigorous, we can confidently recommend *We're Going to be Rich;* it has about it the flavour of the good old Westerns, when the villain hit the hero over the head with a table, and the hero then threw him down three flights of stairs.

—H. E. Blyth, *World Film News*

Break the News

(René Clair—G.F.D.)
Jack Buchanan, Maurice Chevalier, June Knight.

René Clair's second picture in English is nearly as good as his first. And as the comparison is with *The Ghost Goes West*, the failure is a conspicuous success. *Break the News* is certainly the cleverest and most amusing comedy—as well as being the most distinguished piece of light-hearted film-making—to come out of a British studio since *The Ghost*. The French director who a few years ago couldn't speak the language now does not merely handle it with brilliance, but contrives to preserve his native wit, delicacy of touch, and generally to make grown-up pictures for grown-up audiences, a gift which seems more and more to be the speciality of the French.

This is a typical Clair joke. From the star point of view it is Maurice Chevalier's picture, a great and welcome come-back for a comedy artist of genius. His partner is Jack Buchanan, modest in the part he plays, obviously not intending to be the star in his own production enterprise, but doing his job with skill and charm.

—Stephen Watts, *The Sunday Express*

It may be inevitable that the supposed requirements of the English market should act as an effective check upon M. René Clair's imagination, but this film does at any rate give him an occasional opportunity of getting his own back. For it begins and ends with a malicious parody of English musical comedy, describing its haphazard construction and exposing the inability of all those concerned in it either to criticise their work or even to judge whether it will be a popular success.

At the beginning M. Maurice Chevalier and Mr. Jack Buchanan appear as a pair of grotesquely ineffectual comedians—their imitation is almost too like the real thing to be altogether enjoyable—and even this little opportunity is taken from them by the actress-producer, a creature whom Miss June Knight and M. Clair between them manage to make singularly disagreeable. At the end the comedians have revived a decrepit musical comedy by making themselves well known, and the actress and her satellites, watching them perform exactly the same turn as before, exclaim with evident sincerity "Great artists, Great artists. . . ." In all this M. Clair's fancy is often apparent, but there are passages where the farce runs slowly or is burdened with conventional humour.

—*The Times*

Critical Summary.

It is all rather worrying about Clair. Although "Break the News" is witty and caustic and very amusing, it is yet a little disappointing. Perhaps the memory of earlier things is still too fresh in the mind, and just as we are to-day blaming Lubitsch because he does not seem able to recapture the sparkle and brilliance of "Trouble in Paradise", so do we look on Clair's present work and think only of "Sous Les Toits" and "Le Million". Yet there is no reason to suppose that inspiration is dead; it is lacking only for the moment, and will return. A batsman cannot make a hundred in every innings, nor can a director be at his best in every picture, dependent as he is on the mood of his producers and script writers. "The Ghost" we still hold to be one of the three best pictures ever to be made in this country, and for that we must be profoundly grateful to Clair. His screen career has been one of ups and downs, but if he was going to let himself be beaten by the downs he would have given up long ago—probably after the reception given to "The Italian Straw Hat".

The Girl of the Golden West

(Robert Z. Leonard—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.)
Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy, Walter Pidgeon, Leo Carrillo.

David Belasco's vintage (circa 1904) melodrama, *The Girl of the Golden West*, is back in town again, bringing with it memories of that fabulous pressbook issued by the Warners when they released their second film version of it in 1930:

" 'THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST'
With 12 Smashing Anti-climaxes
and One Terrific Climax
That You'll Never Forget!!! "

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, sponsor of the 1938 —or Nelson Eddy-Jeanette MacDonald— version is not exactly bragging about the anti-climaxes, but they are there, at least twelve of them, and Gounod's "Ave Maria" and Liszt's "Liebestraum" as well.

The production proceeds through its warm, sepia-toned bath by leisurely stages,

"Altitude record for films .. "

opening formally with a prologue, closing formally with an epilogue, and the worst we can say for it is that it is a hopelessly old-fashioned piece of operatic machinery. There's no point in being nasty about these things. Either you like tapioca or you don't. A purely personal reaction is that it is as dated as a tin bathtub in its story and presentation, but redeemed by the singing of its singing stars. At best, we give it a fair rating and suggest that Mr. Belasco's Golden West Girl be permanently retired from now on.

—Frank S. Nugent, *The New York Times*

Lots of people adore glorified vocal banditry, Spanish-English dialect, deafening massed fiestas, jealous senoritas, loud laughter without jokes and Bad Men shedding tears at top-notes. Maybe I am an exception. Over-elaborate and as long as the Great North Road, it is set in the early Covered Wagon Age. Miss MacDonald, local licensed victualler, and Mr. Eddy, with a price on his head, sing nobly and spout lines of no special mental level in the most artificial plot for some time. Puccini wrote an opera on the story. It is a waste of time cocking an ear for his strains, for they aren't there. Just copyright trouble. Musical folk will be swamped by the glutinous new tunes and puzzled to know how "Liebestraum" and Gounod's "Ave Maria" could be sung years before they were composed. A pianist is even made to say that he played the Liszt aria in London "before the King!" Walter Pidgeon, Leo Carillo, Buddy Ebsen and H. B. Warner are also imbedded in this florid panorama.

—P. L. Mannock, *The Daily Herald*

Critical Summary.

This picture was not generally well received, and indeed one reviewer was so outspoken that the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer company took the unusual step of banning him from their Press shows in consequence. We are not concerned with this undignified squabble, but if the notice itself was rather too vehement in the first place, we cannot but feel that M.-G.-M. would have been far wiser to have ignored it. As it is, nobody seems to have come out of the affair very well, and there will be the inevitable suggestion that the biggest film producing company in the world cannot take it. These long musicals are beginning to irk some people not a little, and long musicals, like the mighty Wurlitzer and the Marx Brothers, have ever had the power to make some filmgoers see red. But good or bad, they are nearly all, nowadays, far too long, and that is a fault which is very easily rectified.

Sailing Along

(Sonnie Hale—Gaumont-British.)
Jessie Matthews, Roland Young, Jack Whiting, Barry Mackay, Noel Madison, Alistair Sim.

When Miss Jessie Matthews dances I wish her not so much a wave o' the sea—for I am not so greedy of her talent as Florizel was of Perdita's—but rather a wave o' the barley, taking the field in one general undulation and leaving it in sunlight and a warm, unruffled rankness. Coming down a peg or two, I should like to be understood as saying that a little of anybody's dancing goes a long

way with me, and that when it comes to a star, even Miss Jessie Matthews, tap-dancing all the way round a Thames barge on which she is supposed to be working, I have had enough long before she has made a complete round of the boat-deck. This barge, we are told, is conveying bricks from Brightlingsea to Reading; it need hardly be said that there is not a glimmer of a brick, even if one had wanted to see a brick. Mr. Young is always excellent as the distinguished millionaire, who eats his heart out while the young couple are enjoying themselves, and Mr. Whiting and Miss Matthews are supremely good at enjoying themselves. When they do dance you wish them a wave o' the Thames at Maidenhead. . . . But no more o' that.

—James Agate, *The Tatler*

Miss Matthews sings and dances expertly and is the victim of an inept screenplay that concerns her history from barge girl to musical comedy queen. The picture is a series of monotonous, thinly motivated arguments that get nowhere. *Danger.*

—*Stage*

Jezebel

(William Wyler—Warner Brothers.)
Bette Davis, George Brent, Henry Fonda.

Without the current fashion for *Gone With The Wind*, this might not be reckoned as very much of a story. It is the biography of a spoilt New Orleans minx who jilts the men and shocks the ladies way back in the days when crinolines were crinolines. It is a handsome period piece, adroitly done to catch the present fancy, but Miss Davis is its centre. This bland wisp of steel, who began her screen career as the good girl in a film called *Bad Girl*, is more efficient than all the old-time vamps in her powers of conveying evil. When her frank eyes look full at you and lie, she is dangerous. When she smiles, she is secret and terrifying. Everything she does is cool, measured, with the hint of a keen business brain behind it. I recommend *Jezebel* as the virtuoso performance of a very remarkable young woman, whose incarnadinations are seldom too bad to be true.

—C. A. Lejeune, *The Sunday Observer*

Critical Summary.

In 1936 *Bette Davis won the Motion Picture Academy's Award for her acting in "Dangerous", but if this award does not nowadays carry any great weight with the knowledgeable—in this case the Academy were just a year too late, since her best performance was undoubtedly in "Of Human Bondage"—her success in this field does indicate her general recognition as an emotional actress of marked ability. It has been said that the brothers Warner, with masterly foresight, have forestalled David O. Selznick and "Gone With The Wind" by producing "Jezebel", a story which strongly resembles Miss Margaret Mitchell's novel. Indeed it was even suggested that Selznick should take over the "Jezebel" cast* in toto, *since such few changes were necessary, a suggestion to which the maestro is said to have somewhat acidly replied "I would accept the offer if I, too, were going to make a B picture".*

"Seldom too bad to be true . . . "

J'Accuse

(Abel Gance—French.)
Victor Francen.

A war film of a very different type is *J'Accuse*, founded upon Hans Chlumberg's *Miracle at Verdun*, the play done by Ronald Adam at the Embassy some little while ago. Dead soldiers rise from their graves to find themselves flouted and rejected by the living. When the miracle happens the pacifist is burnt.

Every reaction to this extraordinary film must be personal and individual. There is no denying its force, its poignant and moving arraignment of war. And if you are in the mood to be shocked and horrified by the hurricane of battle, the ghastliness of modern warfare, this is your film. Directed by Abel Gance, with an unswerving fidelity to actuality, it still cannot avoid the element of triangular passion and the love of a soldier for another soldier's wife.

—Sydney W. Carroll, *The Sunday Times*

J'Accuse is an anti-war demonstration of phenomenal force and persuasion, made by Abel Gance on the bones of his silent film of the same name—a film which no picture-goer of the early 'twenties can ever quite get out of his system.

Using as actors the war veterans of 1914–1918, men who carry their scars like banners, it shows the dead of the last war rising from their graves to protest against the threat of a new mobilisation.

There is no panache left for warfare when Gance has done with it. The film is ugly and brutal; emphatically not a film for people who are readily haunted. But as a contemporary document in celluloid, directed to the war-talkers and the war-mongers of every nation, I can recommend it as something incomparably valiant and true.

—C. A. Lejeune, *The Sunday Observer*

L'Équipage

(Anatole Litvak—French.)
Annabella, Charles Vanel, Jean-Pierre Aumont.

I have little or no taste for war pictures. They seldom either interest or thrill me. The best of them invariably arouse in my nature a sense of revolt that commercial value can attach to the reproduction on the screen of man's most destructive instincts. I dislike intensely the idea of men blowing each other to bits. Still more do I detest the notion of men, women and children paying money at cinema box offices to see moving photographs of battles individual or collective. If such pictures must be shown they should be exhibited free of cost and as a national warning.

And apart from the film exploitation of wholesale and legalised national murder, the makers of war films can seldom resist bringing into their narratives passionate love stories and sentimental human conflicts utterly at variance with the main theme of slaughter. They do this presumably to soften the blows, to alleviate the horrors, but with the result that they almost always tend to aggravate them and make them more terrifying and hideous. We cannot bar war pictures from our studios, but we can at least refrain from romanticising warriors or picturing international strife as a background for triangular sex struggles.

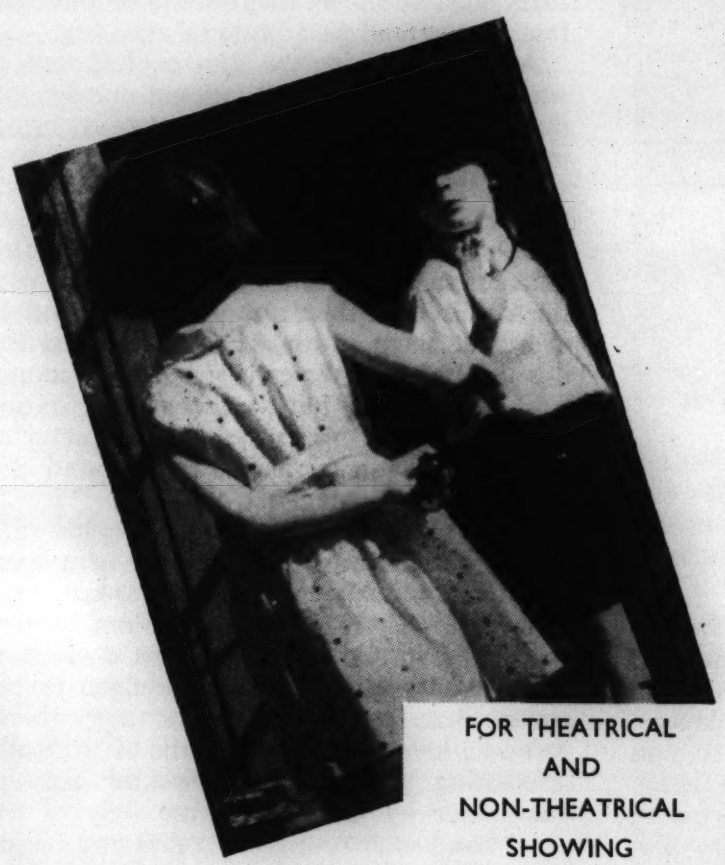
The French have no such scruples. For them love in one form or another is inseparable from other symptoms of human madness. And in *L'Équipage*, a French film, superb of its kind, the greatest and most frightful war man has ever indulged in becomes merely a complement to a three-cornered love story. We have the usual fatally fascinating young woman making the acquaintance by Christian name only of the usual handsome young lieutenant and falling hopelessly in love with him, and the subsequent discovery by the lieutenant that she is the wife of his best friend, a partner in the "équipage" he has formed at the front. The three French people in this drama consequently, instead of concentrating upon the job of war, break their respective hearts disentangling themselves, and only the gallant death of the lieutenant in aerial fighting ends the intrigue.

Anatole Litvak, husband of Miriam Hopkins, directed, and his arrangement of the many combats that take place in the air has been brilliantly successful. In the hour and forty minutes of the film there is an enormous amount of sky fighting, and there are some astonishingly beautiful cloud effects.

This is the picture that was taken up by the Americans and converted into *The Woman Between*; in it starred Paul Muni, Miriam Hopkins and Louis Hayward. *L'Équipage* is a more sincere and affecting film, although in comparison with Muni Charles Vanel makes a less interesting husband. The part of the wife as taken by Annabella is statuesquely unsympathetic but much more real than when played by Miriam Hopkins; whilst the strength of the triangle rests mainly upon a moving and convincing performance of the lieutenant by Jean-Pierre Aumont.

—Sydney W. Carroll, *The Sunday Times*

FOUR FILMS



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The MONTH'S RELEASES

Two best releases of the month are *Something To Sing About* and *Bad Man of Brimstone*. The former, which stars Cagney, is a comedy with music, which gives Cagney a chance to show his versatility as a dancer. Story is of an orchestra leader from New York who tries his hand at pictures. He meets with over-night success but sick of being exploited as a gay philanderer, when in reality he is happily married, returns to his former life. The situations arising from the setting are good and the film, most of which is played in Hollywood, works out on original farcical lines. Cagney gives a clever performance, making the most of every opportunity. He is supported by a newcomer, Evelyn Daw.

Wallace Beery returning to Westerns, in *Bad Man of Brimstone*, plays his part with all the toughness and gusto that he can put into it—no crime seems too bad for him, no law too serious to break. His son, however, has been brought up as a law-abiding citizen and as Federal Marshal is forced to hunt his father. The complications that follow, typical

True Confession (*Paramount*)

of all that's good in Westerns, provide great scope for action and thrills, and with Beery more villainous than ever, the picture should give Western fans all they desire.

The Big Broadcast of 1938 is made noteworthy by the return of W. C. Fields. The film, as a whole, is a loosely put together hotch-potch of entertainment, ranging from Martha Raye's scat songs to Kirsten Flagstad's rendering of an aria from "Die Walküre". Plot deals vaguely with a trans-Atlantic race between two liners. Fields, in good form, does his burlesque golf match—with the addition of a scooter this time—and a game of billiards, but has to work hard against thin material and a poor production.

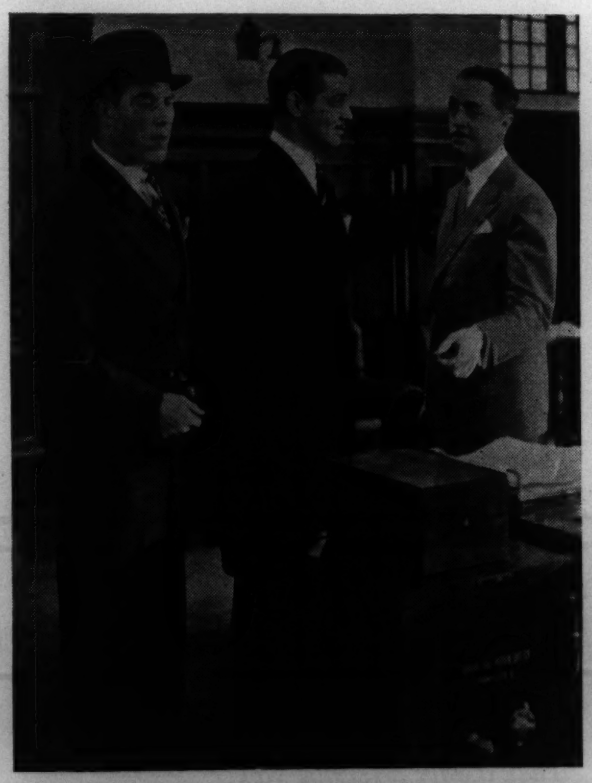
From Cecil B. De Mille comes his annual spectacle, *The Buccaneer*. Staged in the usual De Mille style with the screen always full, the film tells the story of Jean Lafitte, patriotic pirate, who saved New Orleans from the British. Production is spectacular and lengthy, but that does not prevent Fredric March from turning in a good performance as Jean Lafitte. Franciska Gaal has the feminine lead.

A good trio of comedies is to be seen everywhere this month. *Merrily We Live* with Constance Bennett, and *True Confession* with Carole Lombard are both among the best of the crazy comedies now in vogue. Of a different kind is *I See Ice* with George Formby. The star is well up to his usual form in a production that gives him more opportunities than usual. In *Love and Hisses* the Walter Winchell–Ben Bernie battle continues, aided this time by Simone Simon—not so good as *Wake Up and Live*.

Four re-issues of considerable importance appear this month. One, that great gangster film *Scarface* with Paul Muni giving a dynamic performance as an ambitious racketeer, is one of the most moving and brutal exposés of the American gangster ever made. *Manhattan Melodrama*, starring William Powell, Clark Gable, and Myrna Loy deals with the same subject in a more genteel way—but is still an exciting and well-acted story of gangsterdom. Charles Laughton and Norma Shearer return in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, and Garbo, with Ramon Novarro, comes back in the spy drama *Mata Hari*.

Two films which will probably be played as second features are worthy of note. *Dangerous To Know*, an adaptation of Edgar Wallace's famous play *On The Spot* tells of a rich gangster's ruthless methods to get himself into high society. The plot is extremely clever and the dialogue brisk. Akim Tamiroff as the gangster acts well and forceful direction and good atmosphere make the film first-class entertainment. The other, *Of Human Hearts*, is a period drama of a rather serious character. It is made noteworthy by the fine acting of Walter Huston and Beulah Bondi.

Other releases include *Romance For Three*, a comedy with good dialogue and great team-work by Frank Morgan, Robert Young and a host of sound actors; *Love Is a Headache*, with Franchot Tone; a sincere production of the *Dead End* type, *Boy of the Streets*, with Jackie Cooper, and *Penitentiary*, a prison drama, first-class entertainment of its kind.



Manhattan Melodrama (*M.G.M*)

JULY RELEASES

Scarface (Ace Films) * * *
DIRECTOR: Howard Hawks
STARRING: Paul Muni
George Raft
Ann Dvorak
Karen Morley
Boris Karloff
(Reviewed April)

Bad Man of Brimstone (M.-G.-M.) *
DIRECTOR: J. Walter Ruben
STARRING: Wallace Beery
Virginia Bruce
Denis O'Keefe
(Reviewed March)

Of Human Hearts (M.-G.-M.) *
DIRECTOR: Clarence Brown
STARRING: Walter Huston
James Stewart
Beulah Bondi
(Reviewed April)

Something To Sing About (Grand National) *
DIRECTOR: Victor Schertzinger
STARRING: James Cagney
Evelyn Daw
(Reviewed March)

True Confession (Paramount) *
DIRECTOR: Wesley Ruggles
STARRING: Carole Lombard
Fred MacMurray
John Barrymore
(Reviewed February)

Barretts of Wimpole Street (M.-G.-M.) *
DIRECTOR: Sidney Franklin
STARRING: Charles Laughton
Norma Shearer
Fredric March

Manhattan Melodrama (M.-G.-M.) *
DIRECTOR: W. S. Van Dyke
STARRING: William Powell
Myrna Loy
Clark Gable

Big Broadcast of 1938 (Paramount)
DIRECTOR: Mitchell Leisen
STARRING: W. C. Fields
Martha Raye
Dorothy Lamour

Boy of the Streets (Pathé)
DIRECTOR: William Nigh
STARRING: Jackie Cooper
Maureen O'Connor

The Buccaneer (Paramount)
DIRECTOR: Cecil B. De Mille
STARRING: Fredric March
Franciska Gaal
Akim Tamiroff

Merrily We Live (M.-G.-M.)
DIRECTOR: Norman Z. McLeod
STARRING: Constance Bennett
Brian Aherne
Billie Burke
Alan Mowbray

Safe Seat

Are you satisfied with the seat you pay your one-and-six for at the cinema? Is it the sort of thing you wanted? Do you feel at home in it? Does it leave anything to be desired? Don't be afraid to say if it does.

It does, doesn't it? I agree with you. Here, then, is my list of the additions that might with advantage be made to the cinema seat as we know it to-day:

A short length of lead-piping for use on wisecrack-repeaters, those who've seen the film before and know what's coming, and those who haven't seen the film before but can guess what's coming.

A portable anæsthetic outfit, controlled by the patient himself.

A small pair of garden-shears for pruning superfluous floral decorations from the hat of the lady in front.

A rear-view mirror to ascertain whether the fellow behind is having a fit or just enjoying the picture.

A box of rockets for attracting the attention of cigarette-girls.

A breeches-buoy outfit for visiting friends in the balcony.

An oxygen-tent.

A box of coloured chalks for drawing on bald heads in the row in front.

A set of phosphorescent chess-men for use during travelogues.

A stock-whip for silencing Mothers' Meetings three rows forward.

A ferret to fetch your hat.

A sawn-off shotgun for the organist.

A few good books to keep your mind off the usherettes.

A few good usherettes.

A hazel-twig for water-divining.

A small Venetian blind which can be attached to the brim of the hat and lowered at the first sign of Dick Powell.

If any of my readers have further suggestions to make on the subject, I shall be happy to receive them. Address your envelopes to "Auntie Gwen, c/o The Editor (the beast), *World Film News*." And don't forget to enclose the screw-cap from a sack of Portland cement. More next week, chicks, if Auntie's hangover is better.

MUSICAL NOTE

According to Ripley, the "Believe It Or Not" maestro, there is a Bolivian musical instrument called the Charango, which requires a haircut once a year. It is made of an armadillo shell, which constantly grows hair.

They do say that Bolivians calling at the local hairdresser's hate being kept waiting by a Charango. Evidently the Charango is very fussy about the way its hair sets at the back, and always likes a shampoo afterwards and hot towels. It is said to have a plaintive sound, but why a Charango should complain when it only has to go to the barber's once a year, beats me. The more artistic Charangos grow their hair long over the ears and are rather difficult to get on with.

Reading about this reminded me of a 'cello I once had that suffered terribly from boils. Many's the night I sat up with it, applying hot fomentations, and what thanks did I get? But that's the way of the world, isn't it? You give up the best years of your life to a musical instrument, and all the time it's yearning to go out into the world and join a Corner House Gypsy Orchestra.

Next week: How To Cure Bad Breath in Oboes.

Psychological Moment

Neuroses red,
Neuroses blue,
I'm an introvert,
What are you?

You need a neurosis to be a success,
A cosy neurosis will help you progress.
If you've a cute complex, a neat little mania,
Just notice how eagerly friends entertain ya.
It's smart to be screwey, it's dull to be sane,
It's chic to be sick when you travel by train–
Your mother was scared by a ticket-collector—
Of course she was also once scared by the rector,
Which accounts for your urge to perform the Big Apple
Whenever you're passing a Methodist Chapel.
You've got to do things that are frightfully Freudian,
Like letting off stink-bombs inside of the Oideon,
Or, when out at luncheon, start smacking the jellies—
You'll find a good reason in Havelock Ellis.

But don't go to Harley Street
With your delusions—
They'll only prescribe you
A nice dose of Kruschens.

Isn't he like his Father—especially in that Gas-Mask

At any time now your local air raid warden may call at your home with gas-masks in all sizes to fit a family.

There will be three sizes of gas-masks for adults, a "baby's bag" and an intermediate size for children between the ages of two and five. —News Item.

Put little Bill in his baby-bag, Mother,
And watch the tot struggle for breath;
An occasional puff
At the pump is enough
To prevent him from choking to death.
So put little Bill in his baby-bag, Mother,
And if he complains of the fug,
We must tell the young ass
That it's better than gas—
He'll be snug as a bug in a rug,
Glug-glug,
Yes, as snug as a bug in a rug.
So put little Bill in his baby-bag, Mother,
As soon as his lullaby's sung.
Did I hear you say
That he's turned a bit grey?—
Well, the child always was highly-strung.
Now put little Bill in his baby-bag, Mother,
While we get the bomb-shelter dug;
If he looks a bit blue,
Pop his bottle in, too—
He'll be snug as a bug in a rug,
Glug-glug,
Yes, as snug as a bug in a rug. Glug!

Sayings

"A guy needs a little credit before his wedding."—*Jackie Coogan.*

"I may seem synthetic on the screen, but at heart I am just a mother."—*Marlene Dietrich.*

"I am a firm believer in soap and I strongly advise girls to wash their faces with it."—*Mary Pickford.*

"The most intoxicating thing in Hollywood isn't the liquor, but the flattery."—*Bette Davis.*

PET'S CORNER

In a silver-handled coffin, lined with purple satin, there was laid to rest "the only chimpanzee in Hollywood able to express emotion." —News item.

Many film-fans who, on reading these lines, were afraid that they might refer to one of their favourite actors, were immediately reassured by the words "able to express emotion."

LORUM

MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE

Most of us in England know the skyline of New York though we may be ignorant of the main streets of Manchester . . . and most of us would be more at home in the Grand Central Station, New York, than in the Joint Station at Perth.

—Thomas Baird in *World Film News.*

We're familiar with the Bowery
And its accents sweet and flowery,
We're *au fait* with all that happens in the Bronx.
And (unless we're frequent users)
We know less of Stepney boozers
Than we do of San Francisco honky-tonks.

We're familiar with the blaring
Of the Yank expresses tearing
Coast-to-coast with stern-faced business men on board.
Whereas if we heard the hooting
Of the ten-fifteen from Tooting
It would fail, I'm sure, to strike an answ'ring chord.

We're familiar with their news-stands
And their roadside barbecue-stands,
And their rackets and their roadsters and their rye.
We know what a sophomore is
From their Yale and Harvard stories,
But to them a freshman's just a gabby guy.

Don't you think it rather phoney
That the island christened Coney
Should be better known to us than that of Man?
Would we flock one half so gaily
To a picture of Disraeli
As we do to hunt a clue with Charlie Chan?

Take the U.S. Army doughboy,
Born and bred to be a showboy,
Schooled to face the shot and never give a damn.
See how neatly he expires
Just as Uncle Sam requires
(And as long as Goldwyn's playing Uncle Sam).

Watch the good old U.S. Navy
Gets its fair share of the gravy
In the titles on the propaganda pics.
Now, if I remember rightly,
Britain's tars are pretty sprightly,
But it seems red tape and celluloid don't mix.

Show yourselves as true-blue Britons!
Never pay to gain admittance
To films not wholly British in their scenes.
You'll find they often sneak in
'Twixt a travel-talk on Pekin
And a saga of the U.S.A. Marines.

Let this be a lesson to you

An increased supply of cultural and educational films is announced by the Sub-Standard Cinematograph Association.

"Teaching films," it is stated, "are being planned to make clear the complicated processes of chemistry and botany—even of mathematics."

—News Item

There would seem to be an opportunity here for a wide-awake producer to step in and clean up big by putting mathematics on a sound, sexy, cinematic basis.

Imagine Clark Gable, Myrna Loy and Bill Powell in a dramatisation of the old problem of a, b and c. Gable and Loy would, of course, be the base of the triangle with Powell, in faultlessly cut brackets, constantly hanging around the hypotenuse. For the younger pupils we could show Laurel and Hardy in the sure-fire comedy roles of X and Y, the boys who were constantly digging fields or filling cisterns. We might, I think, alter the text of the original problem sufficiently to have Y fall flat on his face in his own cistern, or have him sit down backwards on the fork which X had laid down after a hard bout of field-digging. That ought to get the lower fourth rolling in the aisles.

But why not go the whole hog with a full-length feature film—a mathematical smash-hit in glorious Technicolor? Something like this:

I'M NO ANGLE

Based on a Story by Bud Euclid.

A Rhomboid ..... Mae West
The Square on the Hypotenuse
Kath Hepburn
Vulgar Fractions.... The Ritz Brothers
A Parallelogram..... Gary Cooper
Simple Division.....George Arliss
A Recurring Decimal Lionel Barrymore
And the Lovely Logarhythm Girls

* * *

"I've been peeling off layers of theatrical tinsel. I find that under the wrapping there's some one I want to know."—*Gilda Gray.*

Loose Lines

Restaurants ending in -elli
Are generally smelly.

Those ending in -etta
Are little betta.

I have found
There are two kinds of hound.
The kind that makes eyes at me,
And the kind that flies at me.

* * *

Hip! Hip!
Everyone cheers,
Beverly Nichols
Has sat on the shears.

"H'YA TOOTS"

BOOK REVIEWS

I SHOULD HAVE STAYED HOME

By Horace McCoy
(Arthur Barker, 7*s.* 6*d.*)

"DID anyone ever tell you that you were handsome?" she asked. "No Ma'am," I said, feeling my cheeks get hot. "You are. You're the handsomest boy I've ever seen in my life". I looked away, out of the window. She put her drink on the tray and leaned over, her body touched mine.

"And I'm crazy about you", she said. "I'm mad about you." Before I could do or say anything she took my head in her hands, kissing me all over the face and eyes and biting my ear. I finally pushed her away, standing up. She pulled me down beside her again. "Please—Please" she said. "Don't you like me a little?" "Of course I like you, I like you a lot. Why shouldn't I? You've been nice to me." "Kiss me," she said. "Touch me. Hit me. Anything". I kissed her on the lips. "Not like that," she said, "Not like that. Like this".

It's a funny thing, but practically all the novels that come from Hollywood are about the same thing. *Hollywood Girl*, *Hollywood Cemetery*, *The Promised Land* and finally this one *I Should Have Stayed Home* by Horace McCoy, a scenario writer. Maybe, it was because of his profession that McCoy thought out the new angle and chose a man as his heroine. The book is claimed to be "A plain unvarnished account of the struggles of an ordinary man in a community where greed and jealousy predominate", the story of an extra's troubles. But if as much attention had been paid to the extra proper as has been paid to the sugaring it would have been a great deal better book than it is. Horace McCoy is a very fine writer and his earlier book *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* gave the real inside story of a dancing marathon.

I Should Have Stayed Home, although written with the same punch, lacks the realism and information of far more important things than rapes by rich widows.

But all the same, there must be a reason why the Hollywood novelists concentrate on Sodom and Gomorrah and Hollywood.

JOHN TAYLOR.

FILMS IN THE MAKING

By Robb Lawson
(Pitman, 2*s.*)

This is a brief outline of the technicalities of movies—how they came to move, how sound works, how a film is made, how cinemas developed, and so on. Fine. We need more non-academic exponents of the important mechanical adjuncts of modern life that so many people take for granted. And where pictures are concerned Mr. Lawson has many qualifications for the job. Mr. Lawson has told the story of movies ably enough; but his book would have gained strength by a more considered approach to the technical processes he sets out to clarify.

ACTUALITY IN SCHOOL

By G. J. Cons and Catherine Fletcher
(Methuen, 2*s.* 6*d.*)

TWO lecturers at Goldsmith's College, having long been dissatisfied with an educational tradition which prefers the past definite to the present indicative, and has never recognised the meaning of the words "here and now", decided to start something. They organised search parties in the neighbourhood of Kinder Street Junior Mixed School, to see what could be discovered about contemporary life. Among the fauna brought in for examination in successive expeditions were a postman, a dustman, a sewerman, and a fireman. The children put these gentlemen on the stand, and asked them a large number of questions.

What do you do if you can't see the numbers? What happens if you lose a registered letter? Do you buy your own uniform? What time do you get up in the morning? Do you get tips? Do you ever find valuables in the dustbins? What do you do with all the rubbish? What was the greatest fire you ever went to? If you got your leg burnt off, would you have to leave the fire? And many more.

The gentlemen were worthy of the name, and answered all the questions faithfully. Following these interviews, field expeditions took the young explorers to sorting offices, dairy farms, factories, blacksmiths' shops, and other parts of darkest England. In the course of a visit to G.P.O. Headquarters, some of the children cast eyes for the first time on the mighty Thames, rolling slowly seawards through the unknown jungles of London.

Described as an educational experiment, this venture of Cons and Fletcher flies in the face of many well established traditions, not only in the thing taught but also in the method. As for the latter, the children are allowed to ask the questions, and demonstrate their interest. This is heretical, for the Socratic method in general use is for the teacher to ask all the questions and demonstrate his omniscience in the face of their ignorance. Again, Cons and Fletcher take the children out of school for these lessons, contrary to the universal practice of keeping them on hard benches till the bell goes and punishing them from time to time for fidgeting and not listening.

Worst of all, however, the material is useful and interesting in itself and the children enjoy learning it. This is positively subversive. There will be time enough for the frivolities of London sewers and the gaieties of the sanitary services when the youth of the country knows all about Lady Jane Grey, Popocatepetl, the Black Death, Martin Luther, and last but not least, the pluperfect subjunctive.

R.F.

JUNE IN SKYE

By Elizabeth Coxhead
(Cassell, 7*s.* 6*d.*)

Miss Coxhead has made a good job of this novel *June in Skye*. The main body of the book is devoted to mountaineering and it will be a surprise to some that so many technical terms are connected with that seemingly simple sport. Skye is painted as the escapist's paradise, but Miss Coxhead only allows it to be a temporary escape for her characters. She picks them from various walks of life. The heroine is a sophisticated young woman from London; the hero an unemployed youth from Glasgow. The various problems connected with their love affair are not shirked, but unfortunately the book leaves them before the problems are to appear in concrete form in the slums of Glasgow. A sequel to the novel might prove more interesting, though possibly less colourful.

Miss Coxhead has introduced several characters from the film world, but has not elaborated them. They belong to a unit engaged on travel films and the rough draft of their personalities looks promising. It is a little disappointing that their presence has so little to do with the story, for few books on the people of the film world have yet done justice to the remarkable material for characterisation that exists there.

MARION FRASER.

BOOM TOWN

By Jack O'Connor
(Constable, 7*s.* 6*d.*)

DESCRIBED as a "Wilder Western", Jack O'Connor's *Boom Town* is a tough-guy novel with a western setting.

The ordinary wild-west story is adventure pure and simple, ignoring characterisation and providing as much action as possible. The cowboys ride, gamble, shoot, fight and, in a few cases, drink. If there is a woman in the story, she is there to provide complications at critical moments in the battle of law against outlaw, sheriff's posse against rustlers, or cowboys against Indians.

Boom Town is more thorough. It is the story of a silver strike, and the consequent uprush of a town. The workin' stiffs do the mining and the gamblers, saloon-keepers and whores live on their money. A syndicate buys the mine, economises on machinery and working expenses, sacrifices safety to quick profits, and brings about the mine explosion which finally unties the plot-complications.

There is plenty of gun-play, much whoring; some stage-coach robbery. An exciting novel, catching something of the sprawling, lusty growth of an Arizona mining town.

CRIME at the BOX-OFFICE

A G Man can be a dead shot and still be blind

AN expensively built house on the shores of Lake Weir, near Oklawaha, Florida.

All night long, groups of men watch the house.

Inside, a woman and her son, last free members of a notorious family, hunted from one end of the States to the other, changing cars, names and appearances, hiding, fleeing, crossing and re-crossing trails.

Inside, two machine guns with hundred-shot drums, two shot-guns, three automatic pistols, cartons of ammunition, a rifle and five bullet-proof vests, elevated in after police descriptions into "an arsenal".

Dawn, misty and dew-soaked. A man steps from out a clump of trees and walks away towards the house.

"Freddie! Ma Barker!" he shouts. "We are Federal Officers of the United States Department of Justice!"

There is no answer. He goes on:

"We want you to come out, one at a time. You will not be injured."

Still no answer. Minutes of silence that drag like hours. Sounds of people moving about inside the house.

Then a stream of rifle bullets, whipping up the dust around the man near the house. He dodges hastily for cover while his men divert the stream of bullets away from him by opening fire.

Battle begins. Burst of fire, then lull, then bursts of fire again. Inside, Ma Barker and her son Freddie, fighting their last battle against the law, outside nearly a score of police and G Men under cover. The G Men begin to concentrate their fire into the windows from which the two inside are firing.

Finally there comes no answering fire from inside. Tear gas is then fired in. Still no response. The G Men slowly and carefully advance on the house.

On the floor of an upstairs bedroom, they find Freddie Barker and his mother. Freddie, still clutching his gun, is pierced by eleven bullets; his mother, a machine gun, still hot, across her body, lies pierced by three bullets, one of which has gone through the heart.

This is one of the many battles described by J. Edgar Hoover in his book *Persons in Hiding* (Dent 8*s.* 6*d.*). He is the head of America's Federal Police, named G Men, and is largely responsible for depriving us of our screen gangsters and putting G Men in their place. Which may be good police work, but it's bad entertainment. No one likes the policeman hero, especially when, like the G Men of fiction and the films, he is a college boy without humour or humanity. Compare him with the human oddities assembled for our enjoyment in *A Slight Case of Murder* and you'll see why crime—on the screen—will always pay.

The book is one-sided, of course, because J. Edgar Hoover is concerned to show the G Men in the best light, and the mobster in the worst. He tells about many thrilling battles, some exciting chases, some extraordinary characters. For example, Edward William Benz.

Benz was a criminal. He operated, with considerable success, for more than twenty-five years. His best-known exploit was the robbing of the Lincoln National Bank, at Lincoln, Nebraska, in late 1930, where he got away with more than a million dollars in cash, bonds and commercial paper.

"*Third Degree*" (*March of Time*)

He became a bank robber because, he said, "bank robbers are the aristocracy of the criminal profession". He brought a finesse and a precision to bank robbing that sky-rocketed his reputation among the criminal fraternity, and made him the consultant of scores of intending bank robbers. He advised, re-planned, organised and guided bank robberies afterwards carried out by others. A bank robbery by Eddie Benz secured more reverence from the underworld than a Pudovkin picture once got from the élite of the Film Societies.

Besides being an artist in the quick and large scale transfer of bank funds, deposits and accounts, Benz had other interests. They included the collection of valuable first editions: these, I hasten to add, he bought. He owned an extensive library of rare books, including early editions of the works of John Bunyan, Voltaire, and Washington Irving. He was a collector of old coins too, and achieved some reputation in this line among the foremost numismatic agencies.

He was too, *World Film News* readers will be interested to learn, an amateur movie-maker of great enthusiasm, and made, for the amusement of himself and friends, countless films of towns and places of historical interest. He was a golf player of some ability, and spent his leisure at the best hotels or in the classiest holiday resorts.

An interesting person, widely popular among the law-abiding folk with whom he sheltered at various places. The wife of a naval officer is reported to have said to her husband on her death-bed: "We've travelled to lots of places and met pleasant people. But I really believe that evening we spent with Mr. Vaughner and his wife was the happiest night I ever had and he is one of the nicest men I ever met." Mr. Vaughner, of course, was the alias of Eddie Benz. Such testimonials do not impress our Edgar. He doesn't like gangsters and crooks.

Edgar Hoover tells of Baby Face Nelson, who, after the shooting down of Dillinger as he left a performance of *Manhattan Melodrama*, became Public Enemy Number One and was chased with all the forces the G Men could muster. Everywhere Nelson fled for refuge he was told "Get away from here. The Feds are after you. Use your brains. Get going. This is G Man heat." Baby Face would drive all day. Stay the night at some lonely auto camp, or by the road-side to awake in the night and command "Get in those cars, we've got to keep going."

He fought it out with Feds on the road and got away to die, in the house of a small-town politician, from the wounds.

There are a score of these stories: built around the theme that crime does not pay. But they are hand-picked cases out of thousands, stories chosen to boost the G Men and bump the gangster.

Hoover attributes the successes of gangsterism to the great sympathy of the public for the outlaw and their hostility to the police. To the number of people who shelter or aid criminals, or who keep information from the police. He even refers caustically to parents who refuse to inform on their children, wives who won't tell on their husbands. Hoover's hundred per cent American is a stool-pigeon.

HOOVER has the policeman's view of society. He omits, as the cause for gangsterism, the one factor which more than any other explains its allure. The "success" racket. The national worship, fostered by Big Business, of the man who gets to the top. The business version of "From Log Cabin to White House", which makes money and not public service the test of greatness.

In the teeming, poverty-ridden tenements the urge is to get out, to get above the rest, to escape into the kind of life enjoyed by the successful ones. To get out as an individual. And the philosophy of Big Business is—Every man for himself. The devil take the hindmost. The weakest to the wall. And so on. One way was through Big Business, open to few.

Another way was through crime, through bootleg liquor. There is, in fact, little difference between Al Capone and the Big Business figures of the States, except that Al is now in jail. Law-breaking, thuggery, the crushing of the competitor, the bribing of courts and the judges, the control of police, the use of thick-ear men, the destruction of competitors' goods, the corruption of politics the business methods are the same.

And, as for bank-robbery, Big Business could give Eddie Benz a ten length start and canter home. And gang-methods? Ask the Trade Unions.

So why not get to work on Big Business, Mr. Hoover?

FILM GUIDE

Shorts

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves (Puppets in Gaspar-colour).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: Slatinay and George Pal.
BURNOPFIELD: Grand — July 11, 4 days
GOOLE: Tower — July 4, 6 days
HULL: Waterloo — July 21, 3 days

Coal Face (Poetic treatment of coal mining).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: John Grierson for G.P.O. Film Unit.
SOUND PRODUCTION: Alberto Cavalcanti
ABERDEEN: Topical News Theatre — July 4, 6 days

Cover to Cover (Documentary of book production).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: Strand Films.
DIRECTION: Alexander Shaw.
LITTLE SUTTON: Kings — July 4, 3 days
LONGFORD: Stafford — July 14, 4 days
NETHYBRIDGE: Cinema — July 21 & 3, 2 days
NEWTONMORE: Cinema — July 21 & 3, 2 days
PWLLHELI: Town Hall — July 7, 3 days

Granton Trawler (A documentary of deep sea fishing).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: G.P.O. Film Unit.
DIRECTION: John Grierson.
TARLETON: Queens — July 18, 3 days

Islands of the Bounty.
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
HULL: Waterloo — July 21, 3 days
LONDON: Royal West London, Edgware Road, W. — July 10, 3 days
TARLETON: Cinema — July 11, 3 days
YOUGHAL: Regal — July 14, 3 days

Night Mail (Documentary of the northward trip of the postal special).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: Basil Wright, Harry Watt.
BRIDGENORTH: Palace — July 4, 3 days
WHITSTABLE: Argosy — July 4, 3 days

Power.
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
BIRKENHEAD: Super — July 11, 6 days
BOOTLE: Broadway — July 4, 3 days
CHESTER: Music Hall — July 7, 3 days
HAMILTON: La Scala — July 7, 3 days
HARBORNE: Picture House — July 28, 3 days
LIVERPOOL: Gaumont Palace, Anfield — July 25, 3 days
LIVERPOOL: Casino — July 4, 3 days

Secrets of the Stars (Spotlight on British stages and studios).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: Argyle British Productions Ltd.
COVENTRY: Gaumont Palace — July 31, 1 day
DUKINFIELD: Oxford — July 11, 3 days
GILLINGHAM: Grand — July 31, 4 days
HENDON: Classic — July 17, 4 days
LEVENSHULME: Grand — July 28, 3 days
SHEFFIELD: Cinema House — July 11, 6 days

Six-Thirty Collection (Documentary of the West End Sorting office).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: John Grierson for G.P.O. Film Unit.
DIRECTION: Edgar Anstey.
TARLETON: Queens — July 18, 3 days

Southward Ho! (A journey across Franz-Josef glacier).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: C. E. Hodges.
HENDON: Classic — July 28, 3 days
LONDON: Monseigneur, Leicester Sq. — July 4, 3 days
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE: News Theatre — July 18, 6 days
TOOTING: Classic — July 28, 3 days

Sunny Tessin (Survey of the Canton Tessin, Southern Switzerland).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
BATH: News Theatre — July 4, 3 days
CROYDON: Classic — July 28, 3 days
DALSTON: Classic — July 21, 3 days
LEEDS: Tatler — July 18, 6 days
PADDINGTON: World News Theatre — July 14, 3 days
SHEFFIELD: Rutland — July 11, 3 days
TOOTING: Classic — July 17, 4 days

This Other Eden (A trip down the river Eden, in Westmorland).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: Pennine Films Ltd.
BATH: News Theatre — July 11, 3 days
BOLTON: Rialto — July 25, 6 days
DUKINFIELD: Oxford — July 14, 3 days
HEATON MOOR: Savoy — July 14, 3 days
LONDON: Monseigneur, Charing Cross — July 11, 3 days

To-day We Live (The depressed areas of Wales).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: Strand Films.
DIRECTION: Ralph Bond and R. I. Grierson.
COXHOE: Avenue — July 14, 3 days
FERRYHILL: Pavilion — July 31, 1 day
GRANGETOWN: Lyric — July 11, 3 days

Town and Gown (Buildings, scenery and life of Oxford and Cambridge).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: Peter Collin.
CROYDON: Classic — July 10, 4 days
DALSTON: Classic — July 28, 3 days
LEEDS: Tatler — July 4, 6 days
PADDINGTON: World News Theatre — July 28, 3 days
TOOTING: Classic — July 10, 4 days

Tropical Springtime (Travelogue on Costa Rica).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: Cedric Mallabey.
BATH: News Theatre — July 14, 3 days
HARROW: Coliseum — July 18, 7 days
SHEFFIELD: Rutland — July 28, 3 days
THORNTON HEATH: State — July 18, 3 days

Valleys of Romance.
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
GLOSSOP: Empire — July 4, 3 days
KIRKCALDY: Rialto — July 14, 3 days
LONDON: Tatler, Charing Cross Road — July 25, 3 days
MOTHERWELL: Pavilion — July 7, 3 days
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE: Tatler — July 11, 6 days
WEYMOUTH: Regent — July 7, 3 days
WISHAW: Cinema — July 21, 3 days

Way to the Sea (Documentary of the roads and railways from London to the coast).
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: Strand Films.
DIRECTION: J. B. Holmes.
DARTMOUTH: Cinedrome — July 4, 3 days
DENTON: Palace — July 13, 4 days
EASINGTON: Rialto — July 28, 3 days
FOREST HALL: Ritz — July 10, 1 day
GRASSMOOR: Electric — July 14, 3 days
LIMERICK: Lyric — July 14, 3 days
LONDON: Royal West London, Edgware Road, W. — July 11, 3 days
ULVERSTON: Roxy — July 29, 3 days

Wheel and Woe (The evolution of the motor-car).
DISTRIBUTION: Kinograph.
PRODUCTION: Liberty.
DIRECTION: W. G. Duncalf.
DALSTON: Classic — July 7, 3 days
GILLINGHAM: Grand — July 24, 4 days
HENDON: Classic — July 3, 4 days
PORTSMOUTH: Classic — July 24, 4 days
SHEFFIELD: Don — July 25, 6 days
SHEFFIELD: Sunbeam — July 11, 3 days

Windmill in Barbados.
DISTRIBUTION: A.B.F.D.
PRODUCTION: E.M.B.
DIRECTION: Basil Wright.
TARLETON: Queens — July 18, 3 days

Foreign Films

Le Roi S'amuse
DIRECTION: Pierre Colombier
STARRING: Victor Francen, Raimu, Gaby Morlay, Elvire Popescu
LONDON: Academy — Until first week in July

The Last Night (Russian)
DIRECTION: Yu. Raizman
STARRING: I. R. Peltser, S. M. Vecheslov, M. G. Yarotskaya, N. I. Dorokhin
LONDON: Academy — Indefinitely (after *Le Roi S'amuse*)

L'Homme du Jour
DIRECTION: Julien Duvivier
STARRING: Maurice Chevalier, Elvire Popescu
LONDON: Berkeley — Indefinitely

Orage
DIRECTION: Marc Allegret
STARRING: Charles Boyer, Michèle Morgan, Jean-Louis Barrault
LONDON: Curzon — Indefinitely

Thirteen (Russian)
DIRECTION: Michael Romm
STARRING: I. Novoseltsev, Kuzmina, A. Chistyakov
LONDON: Forum — Indefinitely

L'Alibi
DIRECTION: Pierre Chenal
STARRING: Erich von Stroheim, Louis Jouvet, Jany Holt, Albert Préjean
LONDON: Studio One — Indefinitely

SEEN ON EVERY SCREEN

"Recording by Imperial Sound Studios"

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Imperial Sound Studios
84 WARDOUR ST. GER. 1963

'The Challenge' by Elizabeth Coxhead

THE film still does best with simple themes; the Alpine film should therefore be natural, heaven-sent film material, for it has the simplest of all themes: man against mountain, human nerve and wit against the most beautiful and dramatic of Nature's defences. Here is all the thrill of battle without any need of pathos or pity for the conquered; if the man loses he dies a fine death, if the mountain loses it can afford to lose, and lose again a thousand times, before it becomes something we despise.

But just because the Alpine film is so divinely simple, producers are frightened by its simplicity. They give it "plot"; there must, they say, be human interest, feeling obscurely that a victory with no vanquished is inhuman, that excitement so finely distilled will be without savour. And their efforts to graft on plot have never been happy, except in the case of Luis Trenker's *Doomed Battalion*, which was not really a grafting but a faithful copy of what did happen, the Great War brought to the Alps, moulded by them, changed into something less sordid and more nearly heroic.

The Challenge, the second film version to be made of Edward Whymper's Matterhorn ascent, seems to be two films in one, a good film and a feeble one: the climbing epic, directed in Zermatt by Trenker; the "plot", made at home in Denham's spiritually stuffy studios by Milton Rosmer. It is a poor thing, this plot, an attempt to explain the antagonism between Whymper and the native guide Carrel by the machinations of village "villains", rather inadequately played by a set of English comic actors who seem to have strayed out of a very minor Hitchcock.

Carrel and Whymper clashed because they were two strong characters; their feud was as epic as their ascents, and as elemental: Whymper for the Matterhorn and the sport, with already a breath of public-school spirit in his enthusiasm, Carrel for the Matterhorn and his valley, with a peasant's narrow loyalty, a peasant's sturdy resentment of the gentleman and the foreigner. Doubtless, out of respect for the dead and the Censor, the film could not show all this; but enough of it could have been hinted at to spare us the tedium of a manufactured intrigue.

And curiously enough, by their acting, Luis Trenker and Robert Douglas do hint at it; they are closer to history than the parts they play. Trenker inspired by his mountain, and Douglas, one suspects, inspired by Trenker, form a superb human team against their inhuman and splendid enemy, more beautiful than ever through Périnal's lens. The great climbing sequence is very nearly perfect; at all events, it is the best pure representation of man against mountain that the screen has yet given us; more sensational, of course, than any real ascent of the Matterhorn (most of it was shot on the little rocky Riffelhorn), but that is an entirely allowable cinematic licence. Faithfully it follows Whymper's own simple, classic account: the rival parties from the Swiss and Italian sides, the race, Whymper's triumph, and breathless on its heels, tragedy, the broken rope, the four bodies sliding away and dropping silently, down and down, four thousand feet, to their white glacier bed. . . .

And nothing can spoil that; not even an ending of more plot, a ludicrous attempt to work up a second climax by having Carrel rescue Whymper from a lynching by the Zermatt crowd (which seems a poor return to make for Zermatt's loyal co-operation in the film). For all its nonsense, *The Challenge* is a great climbing picture, a monument to Luis Trenker's mountain honesty, and to his sharp

(*continued at the foot of col.* 3)

Cine Technicians' Protest

In your March issue, Mr. Hitchcock, in an interview, saw fit to criticise British technicians.

Whilst wishing to say nothing to detract from Mr. Hitchcock's own very great directorial powers, we do feel that one of the large contributory factors to his success as a British film director has been the first-class crew of British technicians which has co-operated with him. We assume Mr. Hitchcock's comments are based largely upon his own experiences. Almost all Mr. Hitchcock's films have been made by entirely British crews and he has had such leading cameramen as Jack Cox and Bernard Knowles. The photography of Mr. Hitchcock's films has invariably been of the highest possible standard and the absence of good British technicians, particularly cameramen, seems hard to substantiate in the light of such results.

Mr. Hitchcock further states that young men do not take their work seriously enough, and there is too much of this knocking off at 6 o'clock attitude. It happens again that Mr. Hitchcock's own experience has been particularly fortunate in working with one of the few firms with Trade Union labour agreements in every department, including technicians. Mr. Hitchcock's remarks can only be taken as an attack on the policy of trade unions and employers, such as Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, to regulate by agreement the hours and conditions of employees. His own company has expressed appreciation of such agreements as a large contributory factor to regularisation of working conditions, an important asset in the smooth running of production.

We assume that Mr. Hitchcock would want his crew to continue working until the early hours. Subsequently, he would probably grumble at their slowness and tiredness, after a few weeks of working at this pace. If Mr. Hitchcock has any knowledge of the French film industry during the past few years he will know that under a 40-hour working week—much less than we actually work in this country—the industry has made considerable progress. A leading French director, for example, told us only a short while ago that whilst he had originally been opposed to the proposals he now welcomes them whole-heartedly as the fitness and mental keenness of his crews resultant upon the shorter working week actually results in quicker work and moreover greatly enhanced quality of production. The fact that there are four French films showing in the West End to-day supports this argument.

Perhaps Mr. Hitchcock will think again. In his own interests, if not in those of his crew.

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE H. ELVIN,
General Secretary, A.C.T.

'The Challenge'—continued

architect's eye for the drama of heeling precipice and giddy *abseil*. Even the members of the Alpine Club may look at it and approve; and the simple folk who climb on the hills of the Lakes and North Wales, and stand small chance of getting to expensive Zermatt, will look at it and feel themselves partners in a noble sport.

'LATE NEWS SUMMARY'

B.B.C News Bulletins are not good enough is Radio Critic George Audit's contention.

MORE people switch their radio sets on at six o'clock, especially on Saturdays, for the First News Bulletin than for any other item. It is estimated that fifteen millions, or nearly half the listening public, are tuned in to the average News. Altogether 1 hr. 45 mins. of the day's programme time is taken up by news announcements.

The Bulletins themselves, as everybody knows, are bare statements of the day's events. The four important News Agencies are quoted as sources at the beginning of each Bulletin. They contain no message straight from the "front line", no personal reporting, no factual information to support the news items, no recapitulation of the morning's news. It is not generally known that the B.B.C. are under agreement to broadcast only the evening news. The broadcast news service is not therefore continuous, in the sense that it does not take up the story at six o'clock in the evening where it left off the night before. It is only supplementary to the newspapers.

There is a story behind this situation. Ever since 1922 there have been clashes between radio and the Press. The B.B.C. have themselves admitted in their 1928 Handbook that: "Before the British Broadcasting Company was actually formed, the newspapers induced the P.M.G. to agree that the new organisation could distribute news only at their sufferance." The arrangement was that broadcast news must confine itself to what the Press Agencies cared to offer and that no Bulletins were to be broadcast before 7 p.m. This put the handcuffs on the B.B.C., because the News Agencies depend on the Press for their custom and in some cases are owned by the Press.

The B.B.C.'s attitude at the time was indicated by Sir John Reith in September, 1924. He wrote "Vested Press interests did succeed in placing certain limitations on its activities *for an initial period* (my italics) and it rests with us now so to handle the growing problems of the business that, consistent with the maintenance of *friendly* (my italics) relationships with the Press, additional news facilities be given as time proceeds. I expect the day will come when, for those who wish it, in home or office, the news of the world may be received direct from the mouth of the radio reporter in any quarter of the globe."

But during the following years the B.B.C. found it difficult enough to keep a nodding acquaintance with the Press without attempting any extension of its news service. The Press lords were, and still are, scared of the B.B.C. They showed in a hundred ways their resentment of its swelling "circulation" and its authority in emergencies.

The newspaper proprietors decided not to publish broadcast programmes except as paid advertisements. But like most "ring" decisions the boycott was soon broken. The pressure of the news value in the programmes got too great, and as soon as *Reynolds News* and an evening paper started publishing them the rest soon followed.

When the contract with the News Agencies expired at the end of 1926, there was further pressure from both sides, and as a result the B.B.C. got permission to broadcast running narratives on sporting events and a slight concession in the time of the First News Bulletin, at 6.30 instead of 7 p.m. Their latest time was fixed at 2 a.m. Writing in their Handbook in 1927 the B.B.C. said, "It was clearly understood on both sides that a new agreement with more latitude would be sought for 1928".

But by 1929 the earliest time had only been pushed forward to 6.15 p.m., and the B.B.C. had to record that "The general attitude of the Press to broadcasting has fluctuated between definite hostility and mere watchfulness".

In the succeeding eight years the First News has only been pushed forward another quarter of an hour, to 6 p.m. The four Agencies, Reuter, P.A., Exchange and Central News provide the B.B.C. with a specially written summary of the day's news. To supplement this information where necessary the B.B.C. have installed ordinary tape machines. It is known that a secret financial agreement exists between the parties but its exact terms have never been made public either by the Press or by the B.B.C. Mr. Sydney Moseley has stated that the B.B.C. pay the four agencies over £15,000 per year. As most of this must be considered compensation money for broadcasting the news fifteen minutes earlier, it can be estimated how highly the Press proprietors value their monopoly of news.

With the circulation of a Sunday newspaper and an advertising revenue of £480,527 a year, the B.B.C.'s journal, *Radio Times*, is constantly embittering Fleet Street opinion. I would like to think that the B.B.C. are pressing as strongly for an extension of the scope and times of their news service as they are for the extension of their publishing profits.

These limitations imposed on the B.B.C. by the Press are so severe that it would be foolish to look upon them as permanent. As a matter of interest I do not believe that newspaper circulations would suffer in the slightest if the B.B.C. took to broadcasting a breakfast News Bulletin. Even the Government's Broadcasting Committee of 1936 admitted that "it is possible that at some future date News Bulletins may be wanted at times when they are not now given. Television, for example, must be free from restrictions as to hours."

The compass needle of policy in broadcast news is bound to be strongly affected by the magnetic influence of Whitehall. Remember that the Corporation are legally the eight individuals who are appointed as Governors by the Crown on the Prime Minister's recommendation. The new Charter actually states that "any Department of H.M. Government may send from all or any of the Broadcasting Stations any announcement or other matter which such Department may require to be broadcast". Most of the present news is supplied by Reuter's Agency, which is independent of financial or other control by Parliament, but does not go out of its way to offend the Government of to-day.

Morning and mid-day News Bulletins must come. But there must also be a complete change of method. The B.B.C. must have their own correspondents in foreign capitals. They have always put up financial objections to previous suggestions for such a scheme. But with an improving financial position it would not break them to employ a dozen regular reporters in European news zones. They already have representatives in Geneva and the U.S.A. Spoken reports should be recorded every day for broadcasting. The B.B.C. should also insist on having a seat in the Press gallery of Parliament.

An illustration of what can be done is provided by the Columbia network's coverage of Hitler's march into Austria. (See the extract in the May–June *World Film News*.)

Compared with that effort the British radio public's view of world affairs is rather like the small boy's impression of a football match from the wrong side of a six-foot fence.

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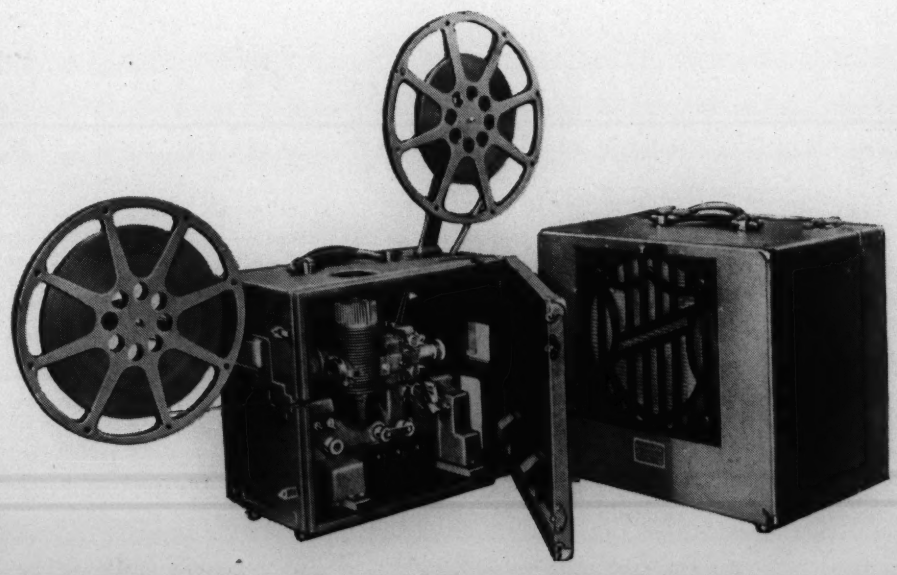

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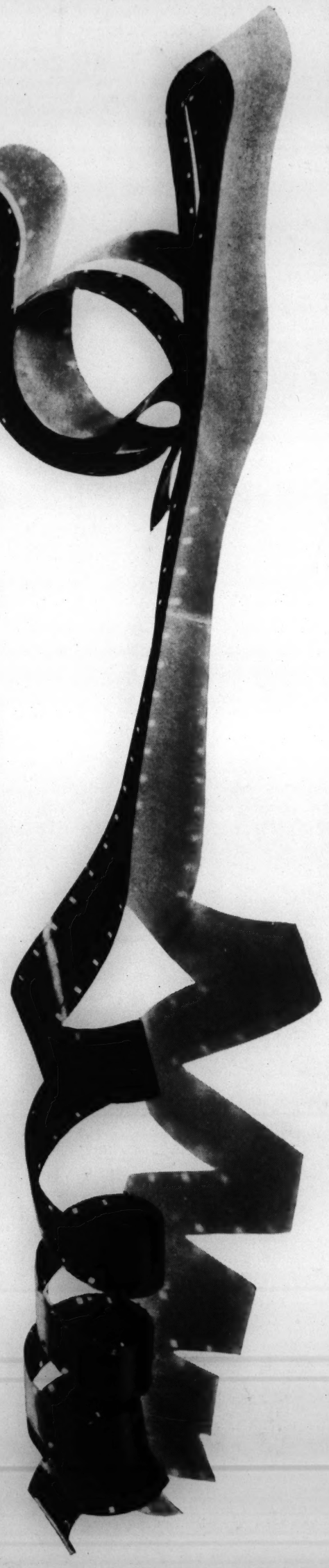

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